THE CARAVAN MAN

ERNEST GOODWIN

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THE CARAVAN MAN

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THE CARAVAN MAN

BY

ERNEST GOODWIN

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
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CHAPTER I

SUDDENLY she stopped, stooped, attempted to pick something off the pavement, failed, and began hastily taking off her glove. With the alacrity that most clearly distinguishes a man offering service to a pretty woman, Bamfield stepped forward, picked up the coin, and handed it to her. She had said, "No, no!" as he leant down. Now as she took the coin she looked blank. "Oh, dear," she said, "you've spoilt my luck."

"I'm so sorry," said Bamfield. "I never thought for a moment — What have I done?"

"I'd just seen it," she answered. "Look! a lucky sixpence, a sixpence with a hole in it. Anybody might have picked it up; in fact, it can't have been here, on the pavement in Oxford Street, for more than a second or two. Perhaps the owner" — she looked round, but no one seemed to be approaching in search of a dropped sixpence. "I suppose it is really mine — or yours —"

"Ours, perhaps," said Bamfield.

"But it does n't mean luck for me now."

"Why not?" asked Bamfield. "You've got it, and the hole's still in it."

"Ah, but I ought to have picked it up. Thanks, of course, but I wish you had noticed that I was trying to keep my toe on it, and getting my glove off."

"Sorry," said Bamfield. "You see, your toe was n't on it, or I could n't have seen it, and I saw you were unable to pick it up, so, naturally —"

"Well," she said with a pretty touch of despair in her voice, "it's done now. But it's no good to me since you gave it to me. One must pick a lucky sixpence up one's self if one wants any good out of it."

"Then perhaps I'm to have the luck," said Bamfield. "I picked it up, I held it in my hand, and the fact that I gave it you means nothing. Yes," he continued decidedly, "it's my luck. All the luck's mine just now. Sorry I robbed you, of course, but — by Jove," he broke off, "it's true, the luck's mine — your hand —" He looked at her ungloved right hand.

She looked at it too. "What's wrong with my hand?" she demanded.

"Wrong?" said Bamfield. "Wrong! — you know as well as I do there's nothing wrong. It's — Oh, by the way, I forgot. I'm a complete stranger to you, and here I am detaining you, and we're both stopping dead in Oxford Street at half-past one in the afternoon, taking up half the pavement —"

"Well," she said, looking at him quizzically, "we'll part, and let the traffic get along. But can't you tell me, in three words, what you want to say about my hand?"

She had wonderful eyes, violet; her lips, parted smilingly, gave a hint of flashing teeth. You might walk a long way even among the crowds of shopping women in Oxford Street and not meet cheeks so daintily flushed. Bamfield looked at her, hesitated, tried to sum her up, saw only the eyes again. "I say," he ventured, "will you, won't you —?"

"Well?"

"Come and have some breakfast?"

She laughed. "Breakfast, my dear man! It's one o'clock, or two o'clock. Whatever hours do you keep?"

"I know what you mean," replied Bamfield, "but you're wrong. It's industry, not dissipation. Honest," he continued as her eyebrows went up, "I was at work at six o'clock this morning. I've worked right up to half an hour ago. I never stopped a minute for bite or sup, and only think of it — I've achieved nothing but ruination. Have you ever had a tract given you?"

"Yes," she answered, "and I read it and it did me a world of good. Are you going to give me one?"

"No," said Bamfield; "but I thought that if there happened to be a Society for the Prevention of

Christian Knowledge — Do you happen to know of one?"

"Of course," she answered. They were nearing westward.

"What society?"

"Why — Society!"

"Oh — that's swift. I only meant that if there were one, properly organized, with a secretary, and funds, and a balance-sheet on the wrong side, like all really praiseworthy societies, and it wanted tracts to spread its insidious message, I could write one for it, a really sinful one, about the thoughtless young man who gave himself into the clutches of the demon of industry, in spite of the warnings of his friends, and at last, when it was too late, he found that for all his work he had done no good, and in fact he'd only spoilt the really important bit of work he had accomplished before he took to sinful labour."

"You're vague, you know, and rather demoralizing, I should n't wonder. What's all this about? Are you the industrious young man? 'The Parable of the Industrious Young Man' — it sounds good. And is your piteous tale remotely connected with my hands?"

"Closely linked. My story is a sad one, but I see you have a kind face — Here's Pimani's. Shall we?" She nodded, and they went in and up to the balcony, and he found a table sufficiently

secluded. "Choose something, will you?" He handed her the bill of fare. "Give me," to the waiter, "a steak, well done, a potato, baked in its jacket, and a pint of beer."

"Dainty, ethereal things you must paint," she said.

"However did you guess?" said Bamfield, astonished.

She chose a soup and the man went away.

"I'm clever at guessing. I was right, was n't I?"

She rested her elbows on the table. Bamfield's eyes were now getting intimate with her. Her hair was strong and fresh-looking, springing vigorously from her temples. Her eyes had beautiful lashes, but he saw now that their chief quality was a wonderful kindness. She was the sort of woman to put herself to trouble to do you a service. If she liked you, at any rate; if she did n't— But who can prophesy what a woman will do if she does n't like you?

"Well, now, you're an artist," she said, "and I gather that you've been making rather a mess of things."

"I have, rather. Decidedly. Horribly. Irretrievably — no, not as bad as that, but just now I've the feeling of hopeless and unmeasured ruin on me."

"Your affairs, or just a picture?"

"A picture. My affairs are quite the other way

about. I'd like to tell you. But about the picture, and your hands. I'd really finished the thing, and then I started messing it about. Every man who paints knows the fascination and the folly of touching a thing when once you've honestly and fairly finished it. There's something inside you that tells you when to let it alone—"

"And then something else inside you makes you go at it again?"

"Exactly. It was quite all right, and yet not quite all right. The hands, you know. I had a look at the thing last night just before I went to bed, and kept dreaming about it, and this morning when I woke, somewhere round about six o'clock, I made up my mind to get up and put them right. A touch or so would do it, and I hopped out of bed, put on my slippers, slipped into my studio, knocked up some paint, and put the touch." He drank some beer mournfully.

"Go on. What happened?"

"Either I put the right touch in the wrong place or *vice versa*. I saw the danger, made a desperate effort to recover myself, slipped, and went over a precipice a thousand feet deep, with sharp needle-points of rock sticking up at the bottom."

"You're inclined to the florid in diction— You mean you spoilt the hands?"

"Spoilt! You should see 'em now, or rather before I just sludged 'em across in despair and

chucked it — lumps of pudding. Hands! They were n't even decent feet."

"Is that considered a drawback in hands?"

"Oh, but I mean, simply awful. Every bit of drawing lost. Not but what, after all, perhaps it's a good job, for between you and me they were n't up to the mark in the first place. The girl that sits for me has n't got the loveliest hands in the world. I'd decided that they would do if I just — well put myself into them, as it were."

"Risky, is n't it, putting yourself into a girl's hands?"

Bamfield chuckled.

"You're a treat. Dear little sixpence, how soon it's got busy. Well, after all, as I say, the hands were n't up to the rest."

"Much 'rest'?" she asked.

Bamfield dipped his nose into his tankard. "A good bit."

"H'm! so that's the sort of man you are. You squander your youth —"

"Oh, come, don't, please, talk like that, I'm rather cracked on this, you know, and you never know when I might turn serious and come out with a tremendous defence of the nude."

"Don't," she said. "It might mislead the waiter. I'm sure he's interested already, and he'll get certain definite and mistaken ideas about me and you if he hears. I don't mind about you — you're only

an artist and you don't matter — but I am a respectable mar —" She stopped.

"I know," said Bamfield.

"How did you?"

"You're not the only clever one at guessing, young madam. For all you're so delightfully slender and girlish, you're married, and no one would take you for more than three-and-twenty, but you're nearly thirty. — Annoyed with me?" he broke off.

"No, I don't think so. And you're horribly right."

"Don't you mind me. You see, I'm an artist, and I know such a lot of what women are from what they look like. In a way it's my bread-and-butter, is n't it? — so you can't blame me. I know lots more about you; I can't tell you, of course, but I know."

"How do you know, and what do you know?"

"Well, your hands — they're quite exceptionally good. I'm not paying you a blackguardly compliment, but they are. That's what made me jump so, after the failure I made this morning. I'd spoilt my picture, and I lost all confidence in my drawing, and I felt I must find a super-excellent pair of hands to work from; and then came the sixpence, and there were you with your glove off and your hand showing."

"What else?"

"You're — No, I dare n't. Not yet, anyhow.

Wait till I've finished my beer and all discretion vanishes, and then I'll risk a snub."

"Oh, it's something I'd snub you for?"

"I should n't wonder," said Bamfield. "I suppose you're like all other women, unreason itself. The lovelier a woman is, the more she tries to improve herself, to make a man conscious of it. And then, as soon as he realizes, and in his simple, innocent fashion begins to respond to the fascination, she snubs him."

"H'm. You've done a little innocent responding in your time, have n't you?"

"How can I help it? I paint the nude. I — well, I love it. Do you like beautiful things?"

"I love them."

"Well, so do I." He leant his elbows on the table and looked at her meditatively. "Have you ever thought of what life means?"

She was frankly puzzled. "Do you know, I half believe you're John the Baptist. Are you going to convert me? Really you need n't. I'm quite all right."

He persisted in being serious. "What I mean is, what is it that matters? You've got your own ideas, no doubt, but life's a puzzle, is n't it! Well, do you give it up?"

"I can't say. I suppose I do. I find it tremendously interesting, all the same."

"Well, I think if it's got any meaning, any

purpose at all, beauty's got something to do with it."

"I dare say."

"No, you don't; you mean I'm boring you. What are you going to have after that soup?"

"Would they let me have — a steak and a pint of beer?"

He stared aghast. She laughed delightedly. "Oh, John the Baptist! But I must have something. You can order me some cold chicken, and after that we'll have some coffee and a cigarette."

"We shall have to go somewhere else for the smoke, I think; they won't let you smoke in here."

"Does n't matter. You can smoke. I don't really care about it . . . Now, go on; talk."

"What shall we talk about?"

"Oh, stick to your subject. Tell me of life's great purpose. Go on. There you are in the desert, in a goatskin and water-bottle, and I'm sitting at your feet like the Woman of Samaria, with my hair down —"

"That was the Magdalene, was n't it?"

"Was it? I'm not a Magdalene. Anyhow, I'm sitting in the dust, awestruck, drinking in your burning words. The mystery that lies behind life, could we but penetrate the veil of the flesh and reach to the unknowable Something that hides behind — Go on, John."

He laughed vexedly. "I was an ass, I know —

but somehow, when any one challenges me and my work, I become just that sort of serious and gloomy person."

"Serious and gloomy! Not a bit; you're amusing."

He wished he knew her well enough to display his irritation. He had to be apologetic instead. "I know I'm stodgy, but I suppose I'm still dismal over this morning's mess. Even meeting you has n't put me right."

"Do you mean to tell me you worry like that over a hand badly painted?"

"Yes." He spoke seriously. "I don't suppose you — I don't suppose any woman at any time takes a painter very seriously, especially if he works in my line."

"Works?"

"I thought so. That's your idea. Work, for a man, to a woman means something physically strenuous, chopping up logs, or carrying hundredweights of coal about. Blacksmith, ploughman, chasing cattle on a half-broken horse — You ought to go and live in film-land."

"Well, dinkying about with a paint-brush and bits of colour —"

"Oh, finish your chicken and let's have coffee."

"Your damned chicken."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I only said it for you — 'your damned chicken' — that's what you wanted to say, was n't it?"

"Yes."

She lifted her eyebrows, leaning back, undisguisedly laughing. "Temper!" she said.

He had to laugh. "You are —"

"I know I am. Dear man, I'm a fool. I dare say painting is work, only — somehow — well, the nude, you said?"

"Yes."

"Ladies?"

"Principally."

"Well, then, I admit one gets the idea it's more — more fun than work."

"Just the indulgence of a depraved taste, cultivated into a habit, and unfortunately with a market for the pernicious product?"

"Be fair to me. I don't really know anything at all about it. I've never thought at all. Go on; I'll listen. And, of course, in a way it's a compliment to my sex, is n't it?"

"It is. And at the back of it is something deeper and wider and bigger than just a compliment to your sex — there's just the beginning of the unriddling — Oh, I must n't bore you like this."

"No, go on, don't stop. I believe I know what you mean. The unriddling of the problem of life. — I say, what fun! Do you hear what they're playing?"

He listened to the band. "No."

"I don't, either, but it's *revue* music; just the embodiment of all that's frivolous and banal, and here we sit talking about life, and — wonder of wonders! — I'm deeply interested. I'm being improved. I feel it. Honestly now, you are John the Baptist, are n't you?"

"Yes."

"Does anybody else know but me?"

"None, so far. I have chosen you as my disciple."

She mused. "Staff, water-bottle, and goatskin. I hardly think a goatskin would make up into anything *chic* — I must talk to my dressmaker. In the meantime, give me the passwords — We're going to have a sect, or a cult, are n't we?"

"Yes, please" (to the waiter's suggestion of sugar with his coffee). He lit a cigarette. "I'm going on. You've started me, and you've got to put up with it. Beauty's the one solid bit of ground beneath my feet. The people who have a purpose in life don't matter. There are hardly any of them, and they're all wrong, most likely. Anyhow, all their purposes are different."

"Cancel each other?"

"That's it. But you and I, and practically every other man and woman in the world, we just follow our inclinations."

"Do we?" Her eyes laughed at him and he felt a stirring within him.

"We do, even when our inclination is not to follow our inclination. That's perfectly clear, if you stop to think, but you don't."

"Don't what?"

"Don't stop to think."

"Not very often, but I'm making up for it now. My poor brain!"

"I mean to give it you. Well, a man's inclinations come to him from outside. Something attracts him, and he follows."

"I know he does. He ought to know better."

"Now, what attracts him most?"

"You say it."

"Beauty. When —"

"Right! John knows."

"— When man was a primitive savage, just sufficiently above his material necessities to have a thought to spare for something beyond grub and a hole to sleep in, he picked his cave, other things being equal, where he got a good view. Long before that he took for his wife the girl he thought prettiest."

"Or deftest at skinning — skinning ichthyosauri for lunch. They gave me some nice chicken here."

"I said, apart from the material." He ran his fingers through his hair.

She laughed. "Go on," she said. "Never mind me. I have to joke, but I do like listening to you."

"Well, you've got a fact there's no getting away from. Beauty is the mainspring of life. Well, what's the most beautiful thing in the world?"

"I'm *passée* now," she said dreamily, "but you should have seen me before I was married."

"The most beautiful thing in all life is the beauty of woman, and if you like to think it out, it's as if the eternal riddle that's at the back of everything our senses make us aware of culminates in that one master-riddle, the beauty of woman. And, by Jove, the answer's there, too."

"And what's the answer?"

"I don't know. But it's there and nowhere else."

"That's very nice of you. Well, I must go. In the name of my sex I thank you. I ought to have sympathized more with you over those hands. I am really very sorry. You mean, don't you, that you work seriously? I believe you, and those hands are a blow. I know. I wish you luck. You'll get them right. I wish I could help you."

"Thanks. You have."

"Have I? How?"

"I've been noting the drawing of your hand as it lay on the table. I've got it. It's lovely; so's your wrist. But there, you're altogether — Anyhow, I've made good use of my time. You must go?"

"Yes."

"All right. Thanks for coming. It's been jolly — or has n't it?"

"I've enjoyed it ever so much." They both looked at one another.

Then, "No, I won't," said Bamfield.

"You're a dear man, and the discreetest I ever met . . . Look here, would you like me to?"

"You know very well," he began.

"I can't to-day. But where is it?"

He wrote on a card.

"How does one — Oh, well, a taxi will do it. And that's your name?"

"Yes. When will you?"

"It's going to be either to-day or to-morrow — or never. You see, I don't live in London. I'm just up for a week or so, and I'm staying with my sister at Chelsea. I'm buying her a hat. She's not very well off, and she's an invalid, never able to go out of her room; so whenever I come to town I buy her a hat, and she likes to look at it. Is n't that silly?"

There was a suspicion of a tear in her eye. "I'm glad I met you," said Bamfield.

"Now, I may go back to-night, in which case, good-bye; but I may stay over till to-morrow night. Even then — I'm very busy, but if you're going to be in to-morrow afternoon —"

"I'll be in."

"Then, it's just possible. And you can show me what you've managed to do with those disastrous hands."

"Be good-natured. When you come — do come — sit for just ten minutes while I draw in from your hands. Will you?"

"Oh, I never promised to turn model; but we'll see."

He paid the waiter; she adjusted her veil at one of the long wall mirrors; they went downstairs, and she said good-bye. He raised his hat. She nodded, and he wondered what drew him most, the beauty, or the kindliness of her face. "It's been jolly," she said, and turned westwards on foot.

CHAPTER II

BAMFIELD'S studio stood secluded among the ample gardens of the large houses in Engadine Road, Primrose Hill. You approached it down a narrow lane, discreetly gated; at the end of this lane the studio stood in a patch of garden, which could afford pleasure only to the lover of docks; these grew thickly on every available inch of soil not used for pathway.

In the main the studio was a room thirty feet or so square, twenty high, with a great north light on the sloping roof and a window running from this almost down to the floor from the very eaves. On the left as you entered the door was a small kitchen. In the studio itself a flight of stairs at one end ran up to a gallery, eight or ten feet wide, and eight feet above the level of the studio floor. Here were Bamfield's sleeping arrangements.

The studio was bare, free for the most part from the assembly of properties with which the average artist loves to surround himself. It was in fact a workshop, the action ground of a man who painted in the spirit of sheer fighting. It was a battle-ground where Bamfield, never satisfied, always smarting under the sense of defeat, rose as it were a beaten but unconquered man from the termina-

tion of each attempt to make a painting which he himself could accept, and flung himself into a fresh struggle with another, striving with all his energies for the victory he never allowed himself to despair of ultimately winning.

At work he was a deadly serious man, driven by an ambition almost immeasurable. He confessed to no one, but at times he felt possessed of a very demon of jealousy of all the great painters who had preceded him. He had at times immense belief in himself; at others he blushed for his hopes, and poured contempt on his own aspirations. Yet from his blackest despair he would start up, the sense of power irresistible flooding through him, as if a giant mastery dwelt within him, a divinity that, born within him as in a prison, sought to tear an exit through his living self into space, air, light, freedom —

He wrestled then as with angels. In this state he worked at a frightful and exhausting pace, his brain aglow, a frenzy of enthusiasm not far from madness possessing him, and chasing him hither and thither. Something cried to him from within his brain to give it shape, expression, and obedient to the call he strove till physical strength failed him, and he sat once more among the failures of his efforts and his hopes.

For this inspiration never materialized in one single piece of finished work on which he could look

with satisfaction. Under its influence he flew to heights he could not sustain. Packed away in corners, despised, mere matter for exasperated reminiscence when he chanced upon them, were canvases he had started in such moods, all unfinished, some mere beginnings, glowing promises of achievement unfulfilled, or fine accomplishment, never more than partial, and only ruined where evident painful effort had been made to struggle through to the desired end.

The whole of the studio wall-space was whitewashed. A rug or two of taking design or colour was hung here and there. But the most noticeable thing was a painting in oils on the bare wall, a thing of no more than an hour or so in execution, deft in handling, free, powerful, convincing.

It showed the head of a girl, a child not more than twelve, or at the most fourteen, with a face infinitely tender, yet so brave, and with a look of such loyalty in the eyes that it instantly won you. These eyes smiled, trustingly and freely, through long brown trails of tumbled hair, that came veiling down over peach-like cheeks. Some happy accident in the handling of that swift sketch had lent to the child's face just that wondrous texture that belongs to childhood alone, though by rare chance a trace of it may linger to make some woman proud in the first few years of her maturity.

In the shadow of a fold of a hanging rug the

effect was strangely real. Not merely at the first glance there appeared a living face, living eyes, a living presence half hidden there, even when the room grew familiar there seemed to emanate from the sketch on the wall a sense of friendly and captivating youth, unobtrusive yet dominating, informing the bleakness of the studio with the spirit of comradeship and loyalty.

Round the fireplace under the sleeping gallery things domestic had inevitably grouped themselves. There were two easy-chairs besides several smaller, a couch, a heap of cushions, a bookcase, a table littered with an untidy pile of charcoal studies of female figures, one now and then draped, but mostly nude. Here were "details" — legs, arms, hands, ears, breasts, sometimes a mere happy line or so, caught flying, sometimes a monumental piece of study, followed into every detail of shape and tone. A thick rug lay on the floor before the massive steel fender. An old 'cello stood in a corner, with the bridge down. Some prints, a special study or two, an unframed canvas with a finely slashed-in head of a woman, were fastened to the wall. In one corner was a wardrobe with the door open. This was crammed with female dresses of all kinds, shabby enough most of them, but all lovely in colour, some of them brilliant, and their designs fantastic and bizarre.

A small fire burnt in the large grate. Aside from

the fire stood a table on which a large napkin was spread as tablecloth. This was set for afternoon tea, with pretty if cheap-looking china, and a few flowers. Looking from the daintiness, cleanliness, and airy freshness of this table you noted more clearly the general aspect of neglect and disorder in the rest of the room. It spoke, not perhaps of actual poverty, but of a disregard of anything above the merest practical level of method and arrangement. The tea-table was plainly an effort on the part of a man who in his everyday life would have laughed at the notion of doing such a thing for his own edification. As such she noted it when she came.

Bamfield had been pacing his studio, smoking, pausing at times to stare at the canvas on his easel, where a life-sized nude figure of a girl stood out brilliantly under the strong side-light from the tall north window. Once or twice he picked up palette and brush and approached the canvas with the evident intention of working at the hands. Over both these there was a daub of green paint, stabbed onto them in a fit of rage and despair the morning before, when disgust had overwhelmed him. But he did not touch them even now. He hovered over them, brush in hand, undecided.

On the outer door came a rat-tat. It was she, violet eyes agleam, face smiling, teeth flashing. Dressed in a coat and skirt of light brown, with a

white blouse cut well open at the neck, she brought in all the blitheness of the brave February day. She held out her hand. "Well," she cried gaily, "you never expected me?"

"I intended shooting myself at four o'clock sharp, if you had n't come," he answered, and drew her in.

"Oh, what a room! How large!" she exclaimed, standing in the middle of the studio, and looking about with frank interest. "So this is the place where you play, and try to persuade me it's working."

"Take off your hat, won't you?"

"Oh, but wait a bit, John; wait a bit. I don't know. I feel so tremendously in John's power, and somehow I feel that my hat on makes me braver. No, I won't take it off just yet. Anyhow, you know, I only just came for one little cup of tea. Well" — she looked critically at the fireplace, the tea-table, the gallery — "it's all right, I suppose. Why don't you get it cleaned?"

"Cleaned!" said Bamfield, aghast. "Why, you don't mean to say it's dirty?"

"Dirty!" she laughed. "There's work here for two women for a week. How do you manage?"

"A woman comes in on Saturdays and does the place out, and generally she's here for an hour or two some of the other days."

She laughed again, with that evident pleasure

even the most good-natured of women feels in the revelation of a man's blindness in the matter of domestic management. "She's a gem, whoever she is."

"Have n't you ever been in a studio before?"

"Never. I imagined something quite different."

"How?"

"I don't know. It comes rather as a shock. It's so very large, and the walls — why should they be whitewashed? Oh!" she broke off, "who's this?" She had seen the painting on the wall, and went close up to look at it. "What a pretty girl? Some lady-love of yours?"

"She's my sweetheart, if that's what you mean."

"Is n't she rather young? — Why, she can't be more than twelve or so."

"I would n't have her for my sweetheart if she was any older. I don't know who she is. I found her painted on the wall when I came here; some previous tenant. She's a sort of presiding divinity, you know."

She was quite interested. "How pretty. I mean, the whole idea. Why do you call her your sweetheart?"

"Oh, I liked her. It's a charming face. A good bit of work, too, not quite sound in the drawing, but clever."

"And how long have you been here?"

"Nearly six years."

"Let's see — then she'd be something between eighteen and twenty. Why don't you find out who she is, and where she is?"

"For one thing, she might be forty, or sixty, for all we know. I don't know how long the thing had been painted before I came. But what am I to find her for?"

"If she's still young and beautiful — and I'm sure she is — would n't it be romantic?"

"I dare say. It did n't occur to me to try and find her. She's a very nice little sweetheart as she is, much nicer, I expect, than she'd be in the flesh. I feel a kind of ownership sometimes, cousinship, at any rate."

"Well, all right. Now, where are the hands?" She went across to the picture on the easel. "Oh, this — is this it? Why" — she stooped to examine the work — "have you been working at all? You have n't."

"No," he said. "I meant to, but I remembered your hands, and your promise."

"I did n't."

"But you will, won't you?"

"I don't know . . . I like this studio. I should think you could make things very jolly here. Do you sleep here?"

"Up there in the gallery."

"May I see?"

He laughed and nodded. She went up the stairs

with eager, unabashed curiosity, and looked at his simple couch and his battered bath and the untidy pile of books there. She made a face.

"Well, of course, it is n't a lady's bedroom," said Bamfield apologetically.

"I should hope not," she answered, and went down.

She went over to the tea-table. "A fire — but that's nice, too."

"I wondered if you'd find it too hot; but even on a hot day, I like to keep a fire going, just for company."

"You poor thing," she said suddenly. "Why-ever don't you get married?"

"Puh!" said Bamfield. "What an idea!"

"Why don't you?"

"I'm an artist; that's why."

"I see. Devoted to Art, eh?"

"Yes."

"No room for a smaller passion?"

"Precisely."

"We'll see about you, before I've done with you," she said, pitying and scorning.

"Bite granite, viper," said Bamfield.

She sat down in one of the easy-chairs. "There's one thing about a man's room I like," she said; "he generally gets nice comfortable chairs. Now this is luxurious. And new too. Have you only just bought them?"

"This week."

"Not — not for my visit?"

"No," he answered. "But I told you, I believe — or did n't I? — that I'd had luck lately. I'd long wanted a decent chair, but could never afford it, and the first thing I did was to buy these, only last week. Glad you like them."

He put the kettle on the fire. "You'll take your hat off now?"

She unpinned it and tossed it on the couch, then slipped off her gloves, glanced at her hands and at him.

"Yes," he said; "let me look." He took them in his, scrutinizing them closely, turning them over to look at the palms. "Good, perfect. Nails, fingers — and what a lovely droop at the wrist. Firm-fleshed, too, not pappy."

"You ought to be a Circassian brigand, selling girl-captives in some Turkish slave-market."

"I wish I had the selling of you. What a catalogue I'd draw up!"

"For instance —?"

"Dare n't tell you."

"What should I fetch?"

"Anything up to a hundred thousand piastres."

"That's an awful lot, is n't it?"

"I don't really know. It sounds a lot, that's why I said it. But I should n't sell you at all. I

should arrange with a friendly dealer to buy you in, for myself."

She laughed. "What fun! Could you afford me? Did n't you say you were poor?"

He burst out laughing. "No, I'm not. Not now. Do I disappoint you?"

"No, but I don't seem to realize you. Somehow in spite of your luxurious chairs, I thought you must be very poor. You seem to be the sort of man that would go well with poverty."

"You're very complimentary. But when I say I'm not poor, I only mean that I don't have to sit up sewing holes in my socks by the light of a tallow candle, and things like that."

The kettle boiled. He made the tea. She rose from her chair. "I'm to pour out?" she asked.

"Well, it would make it delightful if you would."

"Don't you think it would be delightful for me to be waited on?"

"Well, let me. Yes" — to her shake of the head. "Sit down again."

She slipped off her jacket and threw it on the couch with her hat. "I was only joking."

But he insisted, and she allowed him to persuade her into the capacious chair again. He pulled the table near her, brought his own chair up to it, and poured out tea. She caught his eye, and laughed.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I don't know — it's such fun; and the idea of

your making tea and waiting on me like this — it's such a joke."

"I suppose you think all one's life in a studio is a bit of a joke, don't you?"

"Well, frankly, is n't it? Don't you feel yourself that it's a bit of — it's — I don't know quite what to call it."

"You mean, a bit of a pose, something not quite serious: this queer room, and the little makeshift bedroom, and doing one's own cooking, and painting in fits and starts —"

"And entertaining people like me."

"Well, it is n't a pose. Remember our talk of yesterday. It's serious."

"Ah, now he's commencing! This is the prophet of the desert I have learnt to know and lo — I mean, reverence."

"Oh, I won't be sermony again. If it will please you, I'll admit this life is fun. You see, it's free . . . Do you like this cake?"

"Yes. I tell you what. I should like a piece of toast."

"All right." He jumped up. "I've got some bread in the place, or, if you like, here's a roll or two. Shall we split them?"

"Have you a toasting-fork?"

He dived into the kitchen, came back with a long fork, cut some slices, and prepared to toast.

"Let me!" she cried.

"No; you'll spoil your skin."

"Pooh! I'm not so fragile as all that. Give me the fork."

She knelt at the fire, shielding her face a little with her free hand. Bamfield knelt on the fender near her, and watched the marvel of the play of the contending lights on her, the daylight from the roof-light streaming down her shoulders and back, and the warm red from the fire playing over her face, taking the rose out of it, but giving it a tenderness and richness of colour that made her more fascinating than ever.

The toast made, she ate it with great enjoyment.

"May I make some notes?" Bamfield asked her. She nodded, and he got some paper and charcoal and, arranging her hands as in the pose of his picture, he occupied some ten minutes in work. "I'm just getting the drawing," he told her.

She wanted to see what he had done, and was quite pleased to see her own hands reproduced on the paper. "I think you're clever," she said.

"I am," he told her.

"Conceit!"

"Any amount — I could n't go on fighting if I had n't swelled head."

After that talk died down. She sat quite contentedly looking at the fire. Bamfield watched her.

Now, what was in the man's mind? A moody,

almost a disappointed man, carried along in life not so much now by the buoyancy of eager youth as the grim, dour determination of an obstinate and combative man, passing long periods in brooding and depression, he was now at the very summit of a compensating expansion of spirit. He had been doing what was a rare and hitherto dangerous thing for him to venture on, spending money and holiday-making. At a loose end, idle, and inclined to further idleness for the time, he had met this woman. She was beautiful in face, figure, speech, manner, dress. She had accepted his acquaintance, and fallen into talk which bordered on the intimate in the most natural way in the world. Five minutes after he had spoken to her, a complete stranger, in the public street, she had sat at a meal with him. Twenty-four hours later she was sitting alone with him in his studio, hat, coat, gloves laid aside; friendly, receptive of his advances, so far. What wonder if, harking back along the line of reminiscence and running over it again, from their first chance encounter to their present situation, his thoughts travelled onwards along an easy and alluring road? At precisely that moment she looked up at him. For a second they looked into each other's eyes. He had the sensation of being read. Count it for grace in him that he blenched.

"Let's talk," she said.

"What about?"

"There's lots of things I want to talk to you about. But, in the first place, no love-making." She said it as simply, as unaffectedly, as if she had said, "No milk in my tea, please."

Bamfield was rather taken aback by her directness, and possibly not quite sure of her genuineness. Still, the immense candour of her gaze seemed convincing.

"Don't say that, lady," he answered, in mock dismay.

"I do say it. I mean it. You won't think I'm so silly and — common, as to challenge the very thing I'm warning you from, but I want you to understand that. No kissing. I don't want to. I have to come to this sort of understanding with such a lot of men, often men I like, and it saves trouble and disappointment if we get that point clear at the earliest opportunity."

"Too late, in my case," said Bamfield. "Why were n't you more explicit in the first place? I'm a wallowing sea of disappointment."

"That's right. I like you to be disappointed."

"Do you?" She was a bewildering person.

"Of course. What should I think of you if you'd said, 'It does n't matter,' or, 'Nothing was further from my intention, I assure you?'"

Bamfield came up to the proper level of serious levity at once. "Then let me say that this is the bitterest moment of my life."

"Good," she said complacently. — "Well, now we can talk quite openly. I know I puzzle you, but really I'm not difficult. I like men, always have, and they like me; but I did n't want to get married. I quite understood, and — it did n't appeal to me. Then I met the man I did marry. He's sixty-two."

"Good Lord!" said Bamfield. "And to think —"

"You all say the same. 'To think of so much beauty wasting its sweetness, et cetera.' Be sensible. I wanted the freedom of a married woman, and I did not want marriage. Well, I was n't so much married as collected. My husband is one of the greatest collectors of the day."

"Does he collect pictures?" asked Bamfield.

"Yes."

"Modern?"

"Always."

"God bless and keep him," said Bamfield fervently.

"And modern furniture, and modern china, and modern jewel-work, and craft-work of every kind. He has the most wonderful taste and knowledge. And he saw me, a picture, a jewel, he called me — and perfectly modern —"

"Absolutely *that*," agreed Bamfield.

" — And he collected me. And we are perfectly happy. Understand?"

"I believe I do. It's — annoying in a way, and yet — let me congratulate you."

"Thank you. Now, first I want you to tell me, why are n't you married? Wait a bit. How old are you?"

"I'm thirty-three."

"Then, why have n't you got married? Who do you think you are, to stick here all alone when there are lots of nice girls entitled to a husband —"

"A nice girl would be entitled to a nice husband."

"Well, you would n't be half bad."

"I should," said Bamfield. "I should be the very worst sort of husband that ever was."

"My dear man, as you are, no doubt you would be a poor specimen — I don't mean you'd beat her or come home drunk, but a man who's lived this frightful, unnatural life for — How long did you say you have been here?"

"Six years."

"All alone?"

"Practically."

"Practically — h'm!" She considered him. "I don't know whether I like you so much, after all."

"How much did you think you liked me?"

"That much." She held her hands a little way apart.

"That's not much."

"It's a lot with me. Oh, well, perhaps after all — Anyhow, never mind; you can't be helped. And, besides, I was going to say, a nice, sensible girl would soon pull you into shape."

Bamfield shuddered. "That's partly it," he said. "One sees these nice girls, and perhaps one knows their husbands, and one can't help witnessing the spectacle of pulling into shape. It frightens a man."

She laughed. It was a proper woman's laugh at a man's acknowledgment of her sex's powers.

"Now, about money — You don't claim to be rich, but you are n't quite poor. What are you — just precisely?"

Bamfield stretched himself luxuriously in the chair. "You'll set me going on a subject I can spout about for hours — my luck, and the way it's turned lately."

"Well, spout away. I like to hear of luck."

"You believe in it?"

"I believe in luck, and affinities, and table-turning, and horoscopes, and destiny, and everything of that sort."

"Well, I'll tell you. I've had shocking luck ever since I set out to get my living and make what name I could, by painting. I've been poor, horribly poor, and I have n't made the least little bit of a name till lately. You know, I've been selling all my pictures through one man, a dealer named Iffelstein, a Dutchman."

"That's bad business, is n't it?"

"I dare say, but I'm not businesslike, and, besides, we arrived at an understanding four years

ago. I could n't sell a thing — I'm not a good salesman; I don't understand, or at any rate, I don't want to trouble with the money side."

"But you should."

"I can't. I just want the money, and I can't bear, I loathe, having to haggle with any one. Well, when I was desperate, Iffelstein looked me up and bought my stuff. It was a poor price, but you don't know what a godsend it was. And from that time it's been understood that I let him have all I paint. It suits me in a way, because he pays on the nail, but —"

"He screws you down, I believe."

"Well, he does n't pay much. In fact, I get wild sometimes to think how little I get, but anyhow I've lived, and I've gone on painting, which was what I meant to do."

"Do you exhibit?"

"I used to, but they won't have me now."

"Why not? Not good enough?"

"Too good." She laughed. "I mean it. They're afraid of me and my work. They can't understand it. I've my own theories about colour and light, and what form implies, and just how far one may imitate, and what's unpaintable."

"Well; go on."

"Well, you understand that I got restless about my earnings, and then the brother of a friend of mine who was over from America offered to take a

picture of mine out to the States and see if he could sell it for me there. So I let him have one, and I heard nothing of it for three months, and then a little while ago I got a letter from some New York dealers, telling me he had placed the picture with them, and they had an offer of a hundred pounds for it, and would I tell them if I wished them to accept. And if I considered the price suitable, they could undertake to dispose of more at the same price."

"And is that a good price — a hundred pounds?"

"Good! — I should think it was. Five or six times what I get from Iffelstein. I've only twice had as much as twenty pounds for a picture from him."

"I did n't know. Did you write?"

"I cabled! And I got a wire back, to say the sale was concluded and cheque in the post."

"Have you got it?"

"No; that was only a week or so ago, but it will be here. There now! that's my luck."

"I think I should want to see the money before I was quite sure."

"I'm sure. I knew it would come, some day."

"Well, all right. I congratulate you. Now you'd better get married."

Bamfield laughed. "On the strength of selling a picture? You're keen on seeing me tied up."

"I am. I do really like you. You're quite a nice

boy, but you need marrying badly. Who is there you know that would do?"

"Stop this," said Bamfield sternly. "You're dangerous. So long as you were joking —"

"But I'm not."

"But you were."

"No, I was n't. I meant it. You've got to get married. I get all my men-friends married. They make love to me, and I tell them it's impossible, but I know some one much nicer than I am —"

"You don't."

"Of course I don't. But I tell them so, and I introduce them to some one nice enough, and — there you are."

"Well, you let me alone. I won't have it. Besides, if you start introducing nice girls to me — I might be dangerous."

She considered him. "I think you're all right."

"I'm all right if I can get on with my work. I don't want to marry — I don't really want to have anything to do with any of you —"

"That's why you took me to breakfast five minutes after you had met me casually, and asked me here?"

"You're different."

She laughed. "Oh, yes, I know. We all are."

"But you are. Since you told me 'No love-making,' I have n't wanted to make love to you in the least."

"Have n't you? — Shall I make you?"

"If you want to — but you'll spoil it."

She clapped her hands, flushing with pleasure. "Splendid. That's just what I wanted you to understand. You mean that you just want to be friends?"

"I mean," said Bamfield, "that you are the most delightful woman I've ever met, that I'm more in love with you than I've ever been with anybody in my life, and that I'm quite prepared to tell you so in front of your husband."

"That's right. Oh, how quick you have been. Shall I tell you — that's what they all do. And he laughs, and I like it." She jumped up suddenly. "It's half-past five, and I must go."

"Sure?"

"Sure."

"You'll come again?"

"Yes, I will, I promise."

"When?"

"I don't know. When next I'm in town, perhaps — that might be a month or two yet."

He helped her on with her light coat, and looked about for his own hat.

She stopped him. "I don't want you to come. I told the taxi-man to come back at half-past five. Just to the road with me, if you like."

As she went to the door, she stopped at the picture on the wall. The two beautiful faces,

both alive, seemed to peer closely into each other's eyes. She turned to Bamfield.

"She'd do."

Bamfield looked enquiry. "She — do? —"

"She'd be the girl for you. Why don't you marry her?"

"Good Heavens!" He burst out laughing. "You don't waste time."

"There's no time to waste. Thirty-three! — My goodness! . . . Well?"

"In the first place, I'm not going to get married."

"Quite final?"

"Quite."

"Married to Art, eh?"

"Yes."

"Rubbish!"

His face darkened. He turned stiffly away. "Pray don't let us discuss it further."

She openly jeered. "Don't show me your high-and-mighty airs. I believe the long and short of it is you're a coward or mean — or you're married already, and your poor darling of a wife has been driven away from you by your persistent ill-usage, or —"

"Oh, stop it!" He had to laugh. "Please remember I don't know who she is."

"Then find out."

"And I don't know how old she'd be."

"The right age."

"And I don't know if she'd have me."

"I dare say she would n't, at first, but you'd persuade her — poor little girl!"

"And I dare say she's lost her looks. You don't think I could marry a plain girl?"

"No," — after considering him. "But, lost her looks! — Look at those eyes, dense; they won't change."

He looked closely at the eyes of the picture. The face still smiled at him, frankly, friendly, childish. "She has lovely eyes," he murmured.

"And she's lovely in herself. Yes, that's a true portrait, one can tell; and a girl with eyes like that has a heart that's — that's just the right sort of heart for a man like you."

"And what sort of a man am I?"

She wrinkled her nose at him. "I shan't think you any sort of a man unless you marry her."

"But, be reasonable." He felt nervous. This extraordinary woman seemed to be compelling him in a most outrageous fashion. If he did n't look out — He made halting excuses. "I don't know where she is."

"Go and look for her. I told you I believe in destiny, and you believe in luck; so there you are."

"But suppose, when I find her, she's already married?"

"Then run away with her. But she is n't."

"How do you know?"

"Because I do. Be quick and find her. She's waiting for you."

It was impossible to argue with such a creature. He laughed; so did she. He held the door open; she passed out and up the lane, Bamfield, hatless, accompanying. A taxi on the other side of the street immediately drew over, and he opened the door. She stepped in.

He leant in. "Where to?"

"Tell him, King's Road, Chelsea."

"And are n't you going to tell me your name?"

She pondered. "Next time, perhaps. It depends on whether you do what I want."

"I shan't," he said.

"You will," she returned emphatically. "They always do."

He shut the door with something like a little chill of apprehension running down his spine.

CHAPTER III

WELL, now, there had been quite an agreeable two hours or so, and the pleasure just terminated still left its traces on Bamfield's face as, hands in pockets, he strolled back down the lane to his studio. Halfway down he met the postman returning. He had delivered a letter while Bamfield was taking leave of his visitor. Bamfield strolled on, opened his door and picked the letter up from the mat. Aha! — from New York. He opened it . . .

Twenty seconds later he was flying in a frantic hurry about his studio, looking for the previous letter. He hunted through pockets, on shelves, inside book-covers, behind canvases, every second more exasperated, more anxious, and, as he moved, spreading confusion where confusion already was. "Dollars!" he muttered, incredulous, indignant, apprehensive. "Dollars! — But it said — I'm sure — I remember distinctly —" Ha, here it was. He snatched it up, drew the letter from its envelope, stared . . .

"So it is — dollars!"

He sat down in the armchair she had just left, holding the two letters, and a faint sense of sickness came over him.

Reader, has pity still a lodging in your bosom? Let me evoke it on behalf of our young friend Bamfield.

He had not sold a picture in New York for one hundred pounds; the correct price was one hundred dollars. One hundred dollars — it said so, plainly, in the second letter, but no more plainly than in the first. It was a clear case of a mental obsession. He had always thought in pounds, often dreamed of the day when such success would be his that his pictures would sell for three figures, and reading the first letter, his delight and impatience had so bemused him that he had allowed a mental image to supersede completely the actual vision of his eyes. Twice — he had read the letter over again before mislaying it, and from that moment one hundred pounds had been the centre of the radiant vision that danced before him waking, and hovered affectionately round him in his dreams.

And here was his cheque, the cheque for which he had been waiting. On the strength of it she had just decided that he was to get married. On the strength of the promise of further sales like this he had allowed himself the luxury of what had seemed legitimate elation. Here it was, fairly written, accompanied by a perfectly straightforward and honest letter, with a neat account, showing one hundred dollars received, and deductions for cartage, customs, insurance, cable, and, finally, selling

commission, leaving him, in English money — they had obligingly drawn him his cheque on an English bank in London, so that with no preliminary arithmetical calculation to delay the blow he got it flush in the brainpan at the first glance — fourteen pounds seventeen and tenpence.

And he had expected a hundred pounds.

He had always called it a hundred, refusing to lessen the relish of the round sum on his tongue by permitting even so much as a halfpenny commission to be deducted. The full hundred sounded so affluent.

But that was not all. He had stopped work immediately. He had had a holiday, not a very enjoyable one, but a period of doing nothing and just drifting about for close on a month. (It had done him good; the man was jaded from overwork and the long struggle against defeat.) He had bought clothes. He needed them, but he had done himself very well. He had bought those two chairs. He had settled his bill for canvases and paints, long owing. He had lent a bit to a man in the next group of studios. He had lent a bit — he recognized that he had run across quite a lot of friends and acquaintances, all good fellows, to whom lending a bit seemed the natural thing, he being now one of those happy men who sold their stuff for a cool hundred apiece. A hundred pounds, that is to say —

He was not an extravagant man. Not what you might call a careful man, either. He was genuinely a man of simple tastes. He wanted to paint, and life apart from his work claimed little of him. For the last year or two he had made rather more money than he spent, and there had been a modest balance at the bank; something near seventy pounds. He had drawn it practically all, and it was nearly gone. Unbusinesslike? This man was an artist.

He dropped a line to Iffelstein, the man who bought his pictures. Iffelstein was a business man. He came, saw Bamfield, saw his way, too, to an excellent stroke of business. Bamfield was hard up — clearly here was a chance of doing what every business man in this world longs to do, dreams of doing — a chance to buy something good at the price of muck.

Bamfield had three pictures near completion. Iffelstein bought them, cheap for cash, Bamfield undertaking to finish them. But rent-day was past, Bamfield for the first time for some years wanted an advance. Only twenty pounds or so. He got it — undertaking to paint three more pictures . . .

Bamfield finished the three pictures already in hand; he painted the three others; he painted three more on top of that. He worked like fury. The man's soul was ablaze. This sudden plunge into pennilessness, debt, evoked in him a rage almost

murderous. He felt himself at enmity with the world.

He was ill, sick in body and mind. His hand trembled as he painted. He worked early and late. With renewed bitterness he saw that, strangely enough, under this new influence his work was better than ever. When Iffelstein's cart called and took the nine canvases away, Bamfield knew that he had parted with the finest work he had ever achieved.

In a sudden passion he swore that he would never again submit to the humiliation of selling his work under such conditions. What was he to do? He must paint — he could not live without painting. But this infamous sweating, this yoking of what he knew beyond all doubt was a real genius within him to the sordid business of mere living — never again, by God!

In some such rebellious mood an idea occurred to him.

CHAPTER IV

THE caravan man never hurried, apparently, or worried — Oh, yes, he did — he worried one member of the Ouseton community, the station-master, ticket-collector, porter, goods supervisor at Ouseton Station.

"It's a cock-eyed arrangement," he protested, lounging over the sill of the parcels' office.

"It ain't my fault," said the station-master.

"They ought to rename this place."

"Or the other three," suggested the station-master.

"I don't care which they do," said the caravan man. "Four Ousetons in England — and I suppose my canvases will go the round of the other three before they send them on here?"

The station-master admitted that this was possible.

"Oh — well —" said the caravan man irritably, and went off.

His caravan had been on the common for a week, and every morning before breakfast he went down to Ouseton and worried the station-master about his canvases. At least, he thought he worried the station-master. He concluded that he worried him. He worried himself at times at the thought

of how much he must be worrying the station-master. But he need not have worried over the station-master's worries. The station-master was used to the four-Ouseton complications in the British goods-traffic world, and had long ceased worrying over them. Consignees, like the caravan man, might do the worrying.

The caravan man was nearer thirty-five than thirty, nearer five feet ten than six feet, nearer slender than stout, clean-shaven, rough-haired, obstinate, moody, changeable — also, likeable. He wore flannel trousers, a white sweater, an old tweed jacket with large pockets and slightly frayed cuffs, and a shapeless, greenish-brown hat.

His caravan was quite an ordinary-looking gipsy affair, with red wheels. Its motive power had been a phlegmatic mare. She, however, had been sent for overhauling to Vining the Vet's immediately after the caravan's arrival on Ouseton Common.

Ouseton is only a little place, compact and neat. From the main road crossing the common an old pack-horse track leads to the village. One day, near where this track and the main road parted company, the caravan had appeared, planted in among the group of beech trees there. Besides the trees there are some tall gorse bushes and a most delightful pond. A spring rises clear and cold close by, and tumbling over a boulder or two it tinkles into this pool, immaculately pellucid — unless you

rake the bottom with a stick — shallow, glittering, reed-banked.

Here, if anywhere, the genius of the common had its haunt, yet, strange to say, though now and then people passed it going to or from the Priory, none made a habit of lingering there, save Rose Nieugente. It was her haunt, too. Here she would come on summer days, to sit and dream under the shade of the biggest of the beech trees, a queer, misshapen old monster whose great roots, spreading from its distorted trunk, clutched at the ground like twisted, rheumaticky fingers.

Since the Priory, Rose's home, was quite close by, it was only natural that Rose should have been one of the first to note the caravan man's arrival. The Priory stood right on the edge of the common, and within a minute's walk of the pond. Looking from her bedroom window one night before she got into bed, she was aware of a movement near the pond. A light gleamed there, something heavy and bulky was being manœuvred into position, the sound of a man's voice addressing a horse reached her occasionally.

Life at the Priory was most uneventful. Rose felt that instant uprising of interest within her which only those who dwell in out-of-the-way villages for long years can appreciate. Something happening, and quite near the Priory — a delicious thought to go to sleep on.

Next morning she got a little information and a good deal of speculation from Mary the parlour-maid. Aunt Anne and Granny discussed the new fact at breakfast. A caravan on the common; not a gipsy caravan, that is to say, not strictly under that head. Not, apparently, what might be called a family caravan. There was just one man in it. Not a gipsy, Mary was sure. He had said "Good-morning" to her. Of course gipsies say it too, but only evilly intending. Mary did not think the man was evilly intending. Mary was sure — Mary was pulled up abruptly. Apparently Mary had been early afoot and scouting diligently. Aunt Anne condescended to receive facts from her, but not conclusions. Aunt Anne would draw her own conclusions.

Well, here was a caravan, and a caravan man. Aunt Anne and Granny looked at Rose, who went on with her egg as unconcernedly in appearance as she could contrive. From long experience she guessed what was in their minds, but by good fortune it failed to crystallize into words. She received no interdict against going near the pond till further instructions were issued.

She was thus able quite honestly later in the day to visit the caravan.

All that transpired on that subject was an instruction by Aunt Anne when after lunch Rose was starting for Ouseton on some trifling house-

hold errand. It was always a matter of choice with her whether she walked across the common or went by the road. The road was shorter, the common was pleasanter. "Go by the road, Rose," said Aunt Anne as she despatched her. Rose went by the road without comment.

At one point you got quite a good view of the pond. Rose had a look as she walked. There it was, a large, roomy caravan with red wheels. A wisp of smoke curled about it, evidently from a fire of sticks under the trees. Something on two legs moved about. Very interesting. Gipsies never ventured so near the Priory. Gipsies in their own uncanny way knew all about Aunt Anne, and kept to the Cuckleford end. Rose felt that she would like to know something about the caravan.

But of course caution was called for. Most distinctly more must be known about this caravan before she would be allowed to venture near. Aunt Anne had twice walked past during the morning, and spoke with some definiteness at lunch. The caravan, it appeared, was occupied by a single tenant, a man, young, or youngish, whose appearance apparently had impressed Aunt Anne unfavourably. This last fact did not weigh so much as perhaps it ought to have done with Rose. More than once, she had been compelled to admit, her tastes in several directions had proved to be somewhat at variance with Aunt Anne's. The caravan man was

not a gipsy, but the tone of disapproval in which Aunt Anne reported him to be an untidy person suggested gipsyish ways.

From her bedroom window after tea Rose took a look at the caravan. You could not see it plainly, nearly hidden as it was by the trees near the pond, but it did not look a gipsy caravan. Something about the paint made it look different. And while she looked, the caravan man himself passed the holly hedge that bounded the Priory grounds on the common side, and walked towards the caravan. Rose stepped back from the window, but looked at him. Yes, an untidy person. He had no hat on. The coat-collar of his coat, evidently an old one, was rolled up at the back. His hands were deep in the pockets of his grey flannel trousers, and he smoked a large pipe. His walk was ruminating. Rose failed to gather any impression of him as unfavourable as Aunt Anne's.

It was a mere coincidence that just as he disappeared from view Rose remembered her book. Yesterday afternoon and evening she had been reading by the pond in her favourite spot a book she had got from the circulating library in the village. She had not been able to put her hand on it that morning, and only now she felt certain that she must have left it behind her at the time.

Obviously she ought to go and get it. No, obviously she had better not. Perhaps it would be well

to send Mary, the parlourmaid, across; perhaps, after all, she ought to mention the matter to Aunt Anne. Yes, that was the right thing to do.

The wise in these matters may perhaps explain why she did not do it.

At 5.30 that evening Aunt Anne went out. Granny had been driven in the pony-chaise after lunch to visit an acquaintance and take tea over at Cuckleford. Aunt Anne would walk there and drive back with Granny in time for dinner at 7.30.

About six o'clock Rose went over to the caravan. She approached the spot with a fine correctness of demeanour, head high, but not too high, an air of hauteur touched with condescension, but still human. She wore a coat over her blouse. Interviewing a stranger, she put her defences in good order.

The caravan man was not visible, but Rose heard him moving about inside. She halted close to the door, opening onto the high platform just above the level of the back wheels, and waited. She liked the look of the caravan. It was painted a sort of saffron yellow, picked out with green. It had a green door and red wheels. The shafts, in gipsy fashion, were removed, and stood against one side, and the steps had been erected leading up to the door by the driver's seat. On the platform, at one side of the doorway, wired in to prevent them falling out, were three earthen flower-

pots, brick-red, standing in saucers of the same ware. One had dog-daisies, the second geraniums, the third nasturtiums, all flourishing finely. No gipsy this.

Against one wheel rested a fishing-rod, with a line and float. Evidently the caravan man had discovered or been told that among the water-lilies that spread out halfway across the pond from the bank just by were quite a number of fine carp. Very, very rarely one was caught. One, however, a monster of the greatest antiquity in appearance, might be seen on one or two occasions each year sunning himself; but he was hopeless. He knew far more about fishing than any man, it was said. People spoke of him with affection. Ouseton assumed a sort of reputation for sagacity on the strength of Mouldy Methusaleh. That was what they called the old carp. Perhaps the caravan man was, or had been, trying to catch him. Huh!

The movement in the caravan continued for some minutes or so, then the caravan man appeared at the door. He came down the steps. Rose noted that he came down backwards. He saw Rose, and halted, looking at her enquiringly. Rose moved a little towards him. "Good-evening," she said. She had not meant to say good-evening. It had not occurred to her consciously that the man in the caravan would be the sort of man one said good-evening to. At the most, in addressing people

of that kind, one began with, "Oh —" Aunt Anne did n't even do that. Rose, however, said, "Good-evening."

"Good-evening," responded the caravan man.

"I wanted to know," said Rose, "if you happen to have found a book."

"A book?" said the caravan man, enquiringly.

"A book," replied Rose.

Rose liked the air of polite solicitude with which he took the matter up.

"You have lost a book?"

"I think — I'm sure, that I left one here, yesterday afternoon."

"You were reading here?"

"Yes."

"Where, exactly, if I may ask?"

"Just about where your caravan is, under the tree just by the edge of the pond."

She moved a little towards the place. So did he. This brought them nearer. He looked about the spot she had indicated. He looked with great energy, stooping, turning his head this way and that, peering, in fact, more like a Red Indian tracker following a faint trail than an ordinary white man looking for a book.

There was n't any book there. Yet Rose could now recall exactly where she had left it. She had laid it down beside her half read — it had not been very interesting — and was sitting dreaming,

when she had heard the Ouseton church clock strike seven. They dined early at the Priory, and she had jumped up at once, and gone home, leaving the book behind. Here was the place, just behind this patch of reeds in the pond. She had remembered the book again only when she was in bed, but it did not matter. It would take little harm, and no one would see it, or appropriate it even if they noticed it. Ouseton people knew this was Miss Nieugente's place to sit and read.

The caravan man continued to look about him with an interest so tense that at last it began almost to embarrass Rose.

"It really does n't matter," she said, and began to move away.

"Oh, but it does. A book can't be lost, you know. Was it a book bound in light-blue, with gilt edges and red corners?"

"No," she said; then in some surprise, "Have you found a book like that?"

"No," he said simply.

Rose was puzzled, but checked her obvious question.

"Mine was a reddy-brown cover, with a black back, with the title on it in gold letters."

"What was the title?" he asked earnestly, so earnestly that Rose did not like to point out that in looking for a book lost on an open common a knowledge of the title would be little help.

"'Hearts'—" she began, and stopped. Really this man did not matter in the least, but somehow Rose did not like to confess that she had been reading a book entitled as stupidly as the one she had mislaid. So she wound up, "Really, I don't think the title matters."

"No," he assented heartily. "That's true. It's the stuff in the book, not its name, that counts. Lots of books, really first-rate reading, have unfortunate titles." He seemed inclined to involve her in a disquisition on books. This she could not permit.

"Well, if you come across it—" she began, moving away.

"Oh, I shall find it." Somehow he managed to instil into his voice a detaining quality, so that even as she walked away she felt compelled to stop and turn towards him. "You don't think," he hazarded, "that it might have rolled into the pond?"

"I don't see how it could," she answered; yet she felt she had to wait while he went down the bank and stared into the water, among the tall reeds. "Or into a rabbit-hole?" There were rabbit-holes about among the beech roots. He began to look into these. Rose felt rather inclined to laugh. Was it a book he was looking for, or an escaped Lilliputian prisoner? "It really does n't matter," she assured him.

"Well, I'll have a good look for it, and I'm sure

to come across it. If I find it, where shall I bring it?"

"Oh, don't trouble. I shall be passing." She said that, and instantly flushed as she saw she had said the wrong thing. She had only meant to discountenance at once any suggestion of this man's calling at the Priory. She saw that in doing so she had quite definitely indicated her intention of passing, visiting, the caravan again.

"Well, any time you're passing, if I'm about," he responded cheerfully.

She nodded stiffly and went away. She had gone not a dozen paces when his voice detained her again. "Did you say a blue back?"

"Black," she answered.

"Oh, pardon — yes, black. With gilt letters, I think?"

"Gilt letters."

"Thanks. I'll remember. Not a big book, I suppose?"

"No."

"About — so big?"

He held his hands to indicate a size. Absurd! Did the man think she was enquiring for a family Bible?

"Rather less," she told him.

"So?"

"About that."

"Good. I'm sure to find it, and if you're passing this way again — to-day —?"

"Thank you. Good-evening."

"Good-evening."

She went away with a faint idea that either the man was rather dense, or that behind his apparent earnestness was something that was — well, really, it would be downright impudence — But it could n't — surely he was not that sort of man! She rather puzzled as to what sort of man he was. He was decidedly shabbily dressed. His grey flannel trousers had stains on them — spots of oil apparently. His white sweater was dingy. He had no hat on, and his hair looked as if it wanted cutting as well as combing. His speech had not been exactly common, however. He was n't a countryman, evidently. She felt, however, that if he found the book he would undoubtedly return it.

In the meantime the caravan man climbing into his caravan had felt under the seat of a chair in one corner, and had extracted a book, with reddy-brown covers, a black back, and the title "Hearts Entangled" stamped on it in gilt letters. He looked it through thoughtfully, then put it back under the seat.

If he had formed an idea that he was going to receive an early visit from the girl he had deceived in so unprincipled a fashion, he was mistaken. Rose did not again visit the caravan, either that evening or the next morning. Once or twice next day he saw the white dress and the black tam-o'-shanter

pass along the road that skirted the common, but their wearer never crossed the turf among the gorse bushes towards his caravan. With no sense of offence or fear, Rose had decided that she had better keep away from the caravan. No sense of offence, nothing of fear — this explains, perhaps, why she felt if anything rather pleased when, going to the village in the afternoon, she was aware that the grey flannel trousers and the dingy sweater were moving rapidly towards her. She looked straight in front of her, but all the same she could see that a towel or something of the sort was being waved. This was decidedly unceremonious — you must understand that Miss Rose Nieugente, granddaughter of Old Mrs. Grampette, at the Priory, was a personage thereabouts — but after a moment she decided that there was nothing undignified in admitting the fact that she was aware that the caravan man was coming to speak to her. She turned her head towards him, halted, and waited. He came up in a hurry.

"Good-afternoon," he said very heartily, as he approached.

"Good-afternoon," answered Rose, quite properly stand-off.

"A reddy-brown book, you said?" he enquired.

"Yes."

"With a black back?"

"Yes."

"Gilt title?"

"Yes."

"'Hearts Enwrapped'?"

"Yes — no — 'Hearts Entangled.'" He was annoying her. If the man had found a book, it did n't want all this identification. It was stupid. Was he stupid? She looked at him. No. Then was he — no, surely not; never making fun. Oh, well, it really did n't matter. Evidently he had her book and would give it her.

He did nothing of the kind.

"I found it."

"Thank you."

"I've got it."

"Thank you."

"In my caravan."

"Oh! — " He had n't even had the sense to bring the book across with him. Evidently stupid, then. She felt disappointed.

"I saw you passing," he explained, "and ran across to tell you. Now, where can I leave the book for you?"

She was determined to accept no favour.

"Don't trouble. I'll call when I pass."

"Oh, but I might not be in."

"It won't matter."

"But, if you'd say when you will be passing, I'll take care to be there, and have it handy."

This was sheer common sense. It would be too

pointed not to accept the arrangement. "Very well. I shall be coming back in an hour or so, and I will call at your caravan."

"Do," he said, cheerfully, "and I'll be in."

She merely inclined her head and walked on.

It was about an hour later when, her errand finished, she set out again for the Priory, taking the common way. To her great surprise, she had hardly gone a hundred yards along the green path among the gorse that led to the pond when she heard footsteps behind her, and turning encountered the caravan man. He drew up by her side — again with that eager and earnest smile whose complete innocence she was now beginning faintly to doubt. He had a shabby hat on this time, and this he doffed with due deference.

"How fortunate!" he said. "I was hoping to meet you. I remembered after you were gone that I had an appointment in the village about my camera, and I had to run down there. I've been hurrying back. My camera," he added, evidently introducing the canvas bag he was carrying under his arm. "I had to get the bellows mended."

Rose had to say something, though she felt bound to say it stiffly. Nothing in her arranging to call for her book should have involved her in this walk in his actual company. Still, again, in face of his explanation one could not take offence. "Camera?" she said.

"Yes," he said. "I'm a photographer, you know. You don't happen to know any one in this neighbourhood who wants a photograph taken?"

"No."

"Excuse my asking. But, you see, coming into a new neighbourhood, it's important to get going. Once make a start, get some one to give you a sitting, and you're all right. I'm hoping to meet some one who'll patronize me, some one influential, you know, who'd set the fashion. Not," he added, "that I'm greedy for custom. I like to take a few photographs and take them well."

This was commendable. Rose felt it incumbent on her to drop him a word of kindly approval. "That is a very proper spirit." She felt like Aunt Anne as she said it.

"You think so?" he asked gratefully. "I'm so glad. I wish there were more people in the world like you."

Rose did not answer this. She was conscious of a feeling, which perhaps smacked of haughty pride, that possibly the world would be nicer to live in if there were more people like herself. Still, she could not very well admit the thought to this man, and, besides, she had a feeling that the remark was not one he should have ventured to express, even if there were no harm in his thinking it. So she merely walked on, the caravan man by her side.

When they reached the caravan he ran up the steps and brought out her missing book.

"Thank you," she said. "I'm sorry to have troubled you so much."

"Not at all. A pleasure. You have n't lost anything else, I suppose?"

"I don't think so."

"Not a hatpin, for instance?"

"No — at least — have I?"

"I found one."

"I did n't know. May I see it?"

He went in again, and presently came down the steps with a hatpin. Rose knew it at once; it was one she had lost some weeks before. It had a pretty silver top, but the shaft was rusted.

"Found it down a rabbit-hole," explained the caravan man.

"It is mine," said Rose. "Thank you, I'm sure."

He gave it her. "Now, is there anything else?"

"No — at least, I don't think so." She wondered what he could have found.

"Sure?"

"I think not. What else have you found?"

"Nothing."

"Oh." He was a puzzling sort of man.

"Only I thought, if you *had* lost anything else, I might have a look round for it this evening, and next time you're passing —"

"I'm sure I have n't lost anything else."

"Well, all right; but one never knows."

"Of course — and thank you for finding my book and my hatpin. Good-evening."

"Good-evening."

She moved away. He spoke again. "When are you going to let me take your photograph?"

"Photograph? — I — I did n't say — I mean, I'm not thinking of having my photograph taken."

"Are n't you? Why not?"

He put his abrupt question so solemnly that Rose felt a touch of guilt. He seemed to suggest that she had overlooked a duty — or, at any rate, a proper custom. Rose could not for the life of her see why she should feel apologetic about it, yet somehow an explanation seemed demanded.

"I had my photograph taken only two years ago."

"Two years — it can't be a bit like you now. You've altered tremendously in the last two years, have n't you?"

Rose could not deny it. For one thing, her hair. In her photograph it showed as a thick pigtail, pulled over onto her breast, at Granny's request, when the photograph was taken. Then, last summer, the queer illness had come that kept her indoors all June and part of July, and had made her hair come out "in handsful." Anxious consultations with Mr. Hooper who did the "Ladies' Special Hairdressing" in Ouseton had resulted in

his clipping it off short, almost a schoolboy crop, and now it hung just below her ears, thick, live-looking, but making her look, she knew, totally different from the girl photographed two years ago. She had never thought about it, but now, being questioned, she felt rise in her the desire that comes to every self-respecting girl of twenty for a really good photograph.

And then, too, there was the fact that she was under an obligation to this man, a complete stranger, and, moreover, a man who got his living as a photographer. He had recovered her book and her hatpin, and had most courteously offered to do any further service she might require in that direction. She could not very well offer him money, but here he was, no doubt from a proper business spirit, suggesting just the way in which she could discharge her debt. She ought to patronize him.

See, now, Rose's dilemma, and comprehend her embarrassment, the cause of the faint tinge of red that went creeping over her cheeks. Rose was short of money — as usual.

It was not that she was extravagant. There was perhaps a certain heedlessness about her in money matters. Aunt Anne had often rebuked her for it. Aunt Anne had a tremendous head for domestic figuring. Aunt Anne never in her life forgot to pick up her change, or allowed her change, by foul play

or fair miscalculation, to fall one halfpenny from its just level. Rose did. And the result was that it had been agreed that "she was not to be trusted with money till she showed herself able to take care of it." Aunt Anne meant genuinely enough to rouse any dormant genius for finance that might lie in Rose's head. So far, if there, it had slumbered on, unheeding. All Rose knew about her slender allowance for this month was that she had about seven-and-sixpence left to carry her through the month. It was now the 9th.

"How much do you charge?" she faltered, and knew herself on the instant committed to having her picture taken. She had raised the question of price, and for her dignity's sake could now do no less than sit.

"The price of one dozen cabinet prints, vignetted, sepia-toned, on plain mounts, is five shillings."

Was that all? — Thank goodness, she could do it. And since she could, she must.

"I think — I think I'll have my photograph done," she told him.

"Thank you," he said, so gratefully that Rose saw instantly the anxiety he had been through while endeavouring to secure her patronage. He was very poor, no doubt, and though five shillings was n't a lot to charge, it meant bread-and-butter to him. He was tremendously businesslike, too. He began to settle preliminaries on the spot.

"How would you like it taken?" he proceeded. "Profile, or full face, or — how?"

"I don't know," said Rose. "Perhaps I'd better let you decide."

"If you think so. The profile is — yes — ah-hum — certainly — would you mind if I —" He walked round and surveyed her full face. It was a little trying, but Rose instantly stiffened herself as a young lady should, and allowed no sign of embarrassment to betray her. "Full face also is excellent," murmured the caravan man. "And three quarters" — he stepped to one side — "just as promising. I should have all three," he recommended, "and then there's all sorts of possibilities" — he passed behind her — she half turned — "yes, head over shoulder, chin down" — Rose lifted her chin; "also up. If I may say so, you should give excellent results from any point of view."

"But — I don't think — I'm afraid — How much will they be?" Rose never dared get far away from that point.

He reassured her cheerfully. "All in the one price, five shillings only."

"What — a number of poses?"

"As many as you like. I make no restrictions. Have a dozen different, one to each print I advise."

Were n't they cheap! "Thank you," said Rose. "I will, then." She said it with real feeling. No

normal woman exists in whom the prospect of being photographed does not rouse a feeling of pleasure, and to be taken in this lavish, this opulent fashion — A sudden spurt of enthusiasm for photography ran through her.

"When will you sit?" asked the caravan man; and suddenly Rose blenched. It was all very well to plan a sitting on this extended scale, but to put the scheme into execution was quite another thing. It went without saying, she knew, that she was now landed into a course of deceit, for the simple reason that what she proposed would be instantly forbidden by both Aunt Anne and Granny. Nothing much further had been said about the caravan man at the Priory, but no question had been allowed to exist as to his status. He was an undesirable. Rose knew that, and on reflection her inward pleasure damped down. A dozen poses — It would be difficult to snatch time for one. And at that reflection the little thrill of exultation that had possessed her at the delicious thought of so many pictures faded away into her usual resignation to authority. The whole thing was impossible.

"I hope you won't think me changeable, but, I almost think I won't have them done." She went quite white as she said it. She would have given — what would she not? — to have been able to say, "You may expect me on Monday morning at eleven, if that will suit you."

"Not?" said the caravan man, disappointed evidently.

"I think not." She got it out decidedly, and turned to go. But could she? Was it possible to swing away in that abrupt fashion? No. She could not hurt the man's feelings so callously.

"I'm sorry," she murmured.

"So am I," said the caravan man.

"I had forgotten something."

"Yes?"

"As it happens, I am not likely to be free on — on — on that day."

"Which day?"

"The day I meant to choose," said poor Rose.

"Choose another," said the caravan man persuasively. "I shall be rather busy that day myself."

"I mean, I hardly know how I can find time."

"It won't take long."

"Then, perhaps, another time —" No, that would not do. You must n't leave people expecting like that. "I'm really afraid I must say, better not expect me. I don't see how I can come at all just now."

The caravan man seemed inclined to bring forward either question or suggestion, but almost as if he had glimpsed in her face the distress she felt, he forebore, and Rose felt grateful to him when he suddenly accepted the situation. "Very well. I'm sorry."

"So am I. Good-evening," said Rose, and went away.... At breakfast next morning Rose had a shock. The caravan man had been encountered on the Cuckleford road at twelve o'clock the night before, in a state of disgusting inebriety, his arms linked with those of three other men of low class, all staggering about the road, singing, shouting, and behaving generally in a shocking way. They had been seen by Aunt Anne herself, Aunt Anne, whose lynx eyes saw everything and never mistook a face.

Rose felt a wave of shame sweep over her. This was awful. She had spoken to this man, had visited the spot on which his moving habitation was planted — only temporarily, thank goodness; had engaged him in conversation — and all unknown to Aunt Anne or Granny. True, she told the accusing voice that thundered within her, she had no direction not to visit the caravan, and not the slightest idea of the debased character of the individual whose sins had so soon found him out. But in her heart of hearts she knew herself a sinner. No interdict? No, not expressed, but — implied? Most certainly. And, hacking away ruthlessly at her hurriedly made defences, her dumb pleadings with an outraged conscience, one damning fact faced her — she had carefully kept from both Aunt Anne and Granny all knowledge of her visit to the caravan.

In that lay her admission of sin. When, that

morning in church, she would openly before, and in company with, the congregation, confess that "there was no health in her," and that she had "done those things she ought not to have done," she now recognized that the words would not, as heretofore, constitute a confession so vague that it never amounted to anything really disturbing. They now embodied a grim truth.

There was but one thing to do — she must immediately make full admission to her two relatives. She had done wrong. Confession must precede absolution. It was awful. She must own up. She would now do so. She opened her mouth to speak. The words, "Granny, I must tell you —" trembled on her tongue. They died there. Her lips closed again. In that agonizing moment, when every instinct within her sought for a way of escape, a brilliant idea flashed with lightning speed before her. It ran, "Don't believe it — Aunt Anne's made a mistake for once; you need n't own up."

Whence came that thought, revealing as it did an entirely new state of mind, the beginnings of rebellion, a questioning of Aunt Anne's infallibility, hitherto accepted as one of life's fundamental facts, any one of which disproved, the whole universe resolved into a rabble of contradictions?

There is no need, reader, to plunge into speculation. The matter can be simply stated. Rose doubted the caravan man's delinquency, whatever

the doubt implied, for one and one only reason — she liked the caravan man. There you have it.

Are you vexed, with Rose, or the caravan man — or me? Yes? Well, what are we going to do about it? This is a plain and straightforward story, relating facts, concealing nothing, or very little, glossing the merest trifle. Come; be reasonable; accept the position. Run over the facts. Here's a charming girl, of twenty or so, cooped up in a large house on the outskirts of a remote country village, with few girls in the neighbourhood of her own class, none she particularly cared for, and under the surveillance of one elderly aunt and one aged grandmother, who had persuaded themselves that, for reasons which shall be disclosed later, the instincts and free promptings of the girl's mind must be supervised, directed, trained, discouraged, repressed. In the breast of this young girl there was a wellspring of eager and laughing interest in life, that sought to send a bubbling jet of mirth to joy the beholder with its sparkling. The two older ladies had determinedly capped it, put on a cover and clamped it down. So, cramped in spirit, her thoughts driven inward to brood as no young girl's thoughts should be driven, she lived her life, full of vague longings that obediently enough she tried to suppress as wrong.

And she had encountered the caravan man — and in the first minute of their meeting, with the

first clashing of mutual glances, the beginnings of liking had stirred within her. All unconsciously, perhaps, "Liking" was a state of mind that had never actually presented itself to her among her thoughts as a mentally visible word. But a power that Rose was all unconscious of, could never have comprehended, that, to put it bluntly, no one in this mortal world has ever comprehended, chatter about it as we may, had swayed the poise of her mind to one side, had borne down ever so lightly the even balance of her judgment concerning the caravan man. His clothes were rough and dingy; she liked them rough and dingy. His hat was old — nice and old, said her judgment. He peered at her at times quite searchingly; in some men it might have seemed an impertinence. She might quite easily have resented it — but the scales were not longer balanced, and she accepted his glances serenely, and looked him over in return. His voice pleased her. She liked his abrupt way of speaking. She liked his caravan, his fire, his stupidity — of course it was stupidity and not impudence — about her book, the way he returned it, his camera, his taking photographs . . . all these predilections, hitherto unrecognized, now emerged from their lurking places in the recesses of her mind, boldly planted themselves in her mental balance, and brazenly bore down the scale. She liked the caravan man.

She was quite sure Aunt Anne was mistaken. She was sure he did not get drunk. Some other person, rather like him, had walked the Cuckleford road the night before, inebriated. He ought to be punished, whoever he was. It was disgraceful to take away an innocent man's character in that careless fashion. In short — in short — she would contrive to have her photograph taken, by the caravan man, after all.

CHAPTER V

NOW the facts as to the condition of sobriety or insobriety of the caravan man had better be stated at once.

He had not been in the least intoxicated as Aunt Anne had averred. It is true he had spent the late hours of Saturday in the Pink and Lily, the thatched inn with the September roses still in full bloom about it, that stood at the Cuckleford end of the common, and during that time he had consumed a pint of ale. But his prolonged stay had been brought about solely by a very human interest in the society the inn afforded, and a natural desire to see all there was of the fun.

When first he entered on the Saturday evening he found sitting disposed on the three benches of the low-ceilinged room a collection of eight aborigines of Cuckleford. They were an assorted lot, of varying ages and mode of face-adornment. Some had beards, some mustaches only, some side-whiskers; one that most *chic* of all arrangements in hair, a clean-shaven face with a bushy fringe of whisker running in one undisturbed sweep from ear to ear under the chin. All who shaved at all needed shaving badly. The Cuckleford custom was shave reg'lar every Sunday morning. They

were dressed in tweeds, whipcord, corduroy. Smocks, gaiters, hats, offered proof of independence in taste as regards dress. But they bore this likeness to each other. Each man grasped in his hand — usually his right — a pewter pot, in which lay from a quarter of an inch to an inch of the Pink and Lily ale, all that remained unconsumed of the pot boldly ordered on entry and carefully nursed throughout the ensuing hour. Each pot held a pint. One man, one hour, one pot (pot equalling pint). This was the formula for the Pink and Lily, and was strictly adhered to under ordinary circumstances. To each of the eight customers it occurred simultaneously that the coming of the caravan man might constitute an extraordinary circumstance. Without building too much on it they permitted themselves to — shall we say, hope? — no, speculate.

On his entry they stopped talking as one man, and stared at him with blank, impassive scrutiny. He was aware of it, but bore himself as a man well used to the ways of Pinks and Lilys, Cocks and Bottles, Loads of Hay and such-like country-houses of refreshment; that is to say, he ignored all there save Mrs. Whatley who kept the alehouse. To her he offered greeting and custom in two sentences and one breath. "Evening, missis. A pot, please."

So far, correct. The ale was drawn, the pot

placed on the little counter. The newcomer put his hand in his pocket to pay. All eyes were on him. The psychical moment was come. He either would or he would n't. He did.

Addressing the house — which accorded him a courteous hearing — he put the question they had all strained ears to catch.

"Any of you gentlemen care to fill up?"

Eight pots, held in eight right hands, rose simultaneously to eight mouths, tipped rims, turned bottom upwards ceilingwards, lingered, lowered again. Eight men rose and in beautiful unison stepped to the counter, placed each his empty pot down gently, and all together cried, "I don't care if I do. It's a fine evenin', mester."

The "ayes" had it.

Each man received his pot, full, waited while the caravan man paid, two good shillings and threepence, then as, pot in hand, he faced them and nodded, each man lifted his pot, remarked, "Good 'ealth, mester," and took a fair drink, down to somewhere near the halfway mark, sat down, lowered pot to thigh and said, "Ah!"

Footing was established. He was of their company for that evening.

The time passed as time passes in such places. A little drinking and a good deal of talking. Goodfellowship, no more and no less genuine than you might find among eight acquaintances in more

luxurious surroundings than the alehouse afforded. Some scandal, some philosophy. A wasted evening, one may concede — and yet, little harm, and even some good. Here and there a man might be inclined to be too outspoken as his consumption of ale increased. He was gravely rebuked. The sense of the meeting was against argumentativeness and personalities. Decorum was inculcated. Manners maketh man; the Pink and Lily stood for reasonable behaviour.

Any humour that was there was unintentional. The caravan man, who seemed to find some, had doubtless his own point of view. To some of the talk, deadly serious, he listened, as the company noted, as if there was something funny about it. There was the matter of young Alf Western, and what his end would be. Nothing definite suggested, but you might infer something bad, probably catastrophic.

Young Alf Western was too smart for Cuckleford, and Cuckleford was relieved to feel that it had probably seen the back of him for good. Teddy Parker's peas had been a dreadful business. Teddy Parker, the caravan man learnt, was the oldest hedger-and-ditcher round these 'ere parts. He was also, beyond all question, the champion pea-grower. Year by year, regularly, he swept the board at all the local flower and vegetable shows with an unrivalled display of peas. His supremacy

was confessed with no touch of jealousy, yet the caravan man could surmise that under the strain of his laurels there had developed in Ted Parker an undue pride of bearing. And young Alf Western had took him down something cruel.

The two had met and clashed over those peas. Young Alf Western had openly and publicly derided Parker's peas. Good peas, he admitted, but other people could grow good peas, and a shaking-up was more than likely in store for Teddy Parker, and that very season. Teddy Parker had been dignified, terse, and irritating. The matter passed off.

But only last Saturday night, at this very same Pink and Lily, the company being assembled, with them Teddy Parker, young Alf Western had appeared again, and deliberately (as was now seen) led the talk onto Parker's peas. And there had been a wrangle between him and Parker. And Parker, stung by Alf Western's nimble wit and sarcasmism, had finally attempted to crush all opposition by offering to back the merits of his peas with money. "There y' are, the's my five shillin's, any fair bet you likes." And after further heated discussion Alf Western had put up five shillin's, and a wager was made as follows: —

Young Alf Western might take all Cuckleford in his purview and select twenty pea-pods therefrom, the finest he could pick, from any garden,

or as many gardens as he chose, one from each if he liked, and should produce them before the assembled judges at the Pink and Lily. And Teddy Parker would then undertake to go to his garden and there and then, from his own pea-patch, would pick twenty of his fairest pods and match them against young Alf Western's selection. A generous bet on Teddy Parker's part, yet, knowing the man's peas, the company felt sorry for young Alf Western.

He rejected pity. More, his conduct invited rebuke. For, ostentatiously drinking his beer, he announced that he had already, in his pocket, twenty pea-pods, Cuckleford-grown, and Teddy Parker might hurry up and cull his champions.

And Teddy Parker went off to get a lantern and do so, with half the company, and young Alf Western remained behind and skilfully drew no less than three other bets from the remaining company, one of five shillings and two of half-a-crown, and saw the money put up, and covered it.

And then Teddy Parker came back and showed his peas. And young Alf Western pulled his out of his jacket pocket, and the two lots were examined. And, incredible but true, young Alf Western won. Seventeen of his twenty pods were adjudged to be superior to anything in the Parker group.

The bets were paid, and young Alf Western offered his twenty pods to Teddy Parker, who de-

clined them; and then young Alf Western left the Pink and Lily. As he opened the door, the warmint said, "Night, all. Ted, know whose garden I got them peas out of?" And Parker only stared, having a vague idea of what was coming; and young Alf Western, grinning, had said, "Yourn!" and gone out immediately.

Thank Heaven he had now gone from Cuckleford to London, which was the natural end of such men as he. Nothing yet had transpired as to what had happened to London, but news would trickle through soon.

With such stories, told in deadly earnest, and the occasional emptying of pots, the time slipped by. Admittedly an unedifying evening, and at its termination, when Mrs. Whatley announced the time with, "Come, all you men," more than two or three of those assembled there were none too steady on their feet as they turned out into the rather chilly night, and the now darkened door closed behind them.

It was then that the caravan man, all unconsciously and inspired by nothing more intoxicating than the pure milk of human kindness, laid himself open to the imputation Aunt Anne had flung at him in Rose's hearing.

One pair of footsteps in particular was unsteady, inclined, in fact, to meander very vaguely indeed about the road. Enquiry told the caravan man

that their owner lived at Watercreese Farm, down by the canal, this side of Ouseton, and thereupon the caravan man had decided to give them his friendly assistance and counsel. Sordid, this episode? Well — doubtless it would have been easier and more pleasant to stroll home caravanwards under the stars, hands in pockets, pipe in mouth, all unaccompanied, sufficient of rustic humour for the occasion. The caravan man did not exactly make his offer — accepted — for his own increase of pleasure.

The further help that was volunteered by two other members of the group was not easily declined or easily utilized. For here again in bearing and speech the less commendable influences of the Pink and Lily were plain to be seen. The night air, too, had its effect. The caravan man soon found himself in a position of irksome responsibility. To put it plainly, he found himself with a devil of a job on his hands. His close companions — all arms were linked — were aware of nothing but the happiness of living in that sociable hour, and they became hilarious, they voiced their high spirits in song, they danced — or thought they did . . .

When Aunt Anne drove home near midnight, the carriage swerved perforce to avoid the group of four men who swayed across the road from side to side, close-linked, laughing, happy, tuneful, corybantic; one of them was the caravan man, and

Aunt Anne, who recognized him by the light of one of the lamps, was all unaware that he alone was silent, grave, perspiring in the effort to persuade, assist, and compel the other three men to keep to something of a reasonable homeward way.

CHAPTER VI

HAVING thus demonstrated that instinct is sometimes superior to knowledge — Rose's surmise being much nearer the truth than Aunt Anne's conclusions — let us examine the dealings of fate with Rose, and the caravan man, and the photograph.

Fate behaved extremely well — or extremely badly, you may say. It depends on how your sympathies run. Aunt Anne went over to spend the day at the house of her great friend, Mrs. Stickford, at Stickfordleigh. She was to meet there Mr. Ickledew, the great Woman's Rights leader. He was an exhilarating advocate, and fought for woman's rights up to the hilt. You would have thought, if you had heard him, that he was a deeply wronged woman. Go and hear him, if you ever get the chance. You will be delighted.

In the evening, after dinner, came the news that Aunt Anne had slipped going up the steps of Stickfordleigh House, and sprained her ankle badly. "Oh, dear!" said Granny, and Rose said, "Oh, dear!" too, but in her inmost heart she felt a great glowing conviction that the way was being made clear for her photograph.

And it was. Granny and she drove over next

morning, and found Aunt Anne reclining on a couch. Mrs. Stickford and she were really great friends, and Aunt Anne knew that she was being genuinely pressed to stay till the foot was well. It would have been perfectly easy to get her downstairs and into the Priory carriage, but, after all, why not stay where she was?

And Granny, too; Mrs. Stickford was hospitality itself. Would she stay? Granny did n't think so — then Rose? Rose blenched, but Aunt Anne stopped that. So it was arranged that Rose should stay at the Priory, and Granny would run over in the carriage to see Aunt Anne nearly every day, and stay the night or not just as she felt inclined.

Could anything be happier? Rose asked herself that; yet she thought of Aunt Anne's ankle, and wondered if she, Rose, was an out-and-out hussy.

Granny went off next day, and just before she went decided that that night, at any rate, she would stay at Stickfordleigh House.

"Shall I come, too, Granny?"

"I think not, Rose. Give an eye to the servants — don't let Mary go anywhere near the caravan."

"I won't, Granny."

"And if I'm not home to-morrow night, you'll be all right, dear?"

"Perfectly, Granny. You forget I'm growing up."

"Grow up good, dear, like your Aunt Anne," said Granny, as she kissed her with real tenderness. Away went the carriage.

This was at half-past ten on the Wednesday morning. Rose did some sewing. She decided that among other things to be done that week, if opportunity offered, she must really see if she could squeeze time to have her photograph taken.

At eleven o'clock she wondered if she could find time that afternoon. At half-past eleven — at half-past eleven she was at the caravan.

The caravan man was not immediately visible. All was quiet in the caravan, but as Rose looked about her he appeared up the bank from the pond, fishing-rod in hand.

He looked pleased when he saw Rose. "Good-morning," he said, and stood the rod up by the caravan side.

"Good-morning," said Rose. "I came across — I thought perhaps you might be able to take my photograph."

A look of undeniable pleasure crossed his face.

"Rather! That is to say, certainly. This morning? Now?"

"If you could."

"Decidedly." His "decidedly" was very decided. "Won't you sit down?" he said, and waved her towards where one of the beech-tree roots offered a natural seat.

Rose sat down, and he ran into his caravan. Out he came again with his camera, and proceeded to adjust its long, weak-looking legs. He went up the steps again, said, "Excuse me a minute," went inside and closed the caravan door. Rose saw some red blinds pulled down over the windows at the end of the caravan, and waited for a minute or two, when he came out with three darkslides, which he put down in the shade and covered over with a coat.

"You have n't thought exactly what pose you would like?" he asked, surveying her steadily.

"No," she said.

"Well, we must make up our minds to get the best." Rose agreed. "And that's not the easiest matter in the world." "No?" By no means, he assured her. He explained himself. He explained a good many things as he went about, dragging the spidery-legged camera with him, suggesting frames, now round, now oblong, now square, with his hands, and peering at her through the opening. A face, to an intimate acquaintance, might give an altogether different impression from that which a stranger might gather. Had n't she noticed that? No? Surely she had met with cases where, for instance, children were declared by a new acquaintance to resemble a parent, where those who knew them well saw no likeness. And then, too, plain faces lost their ugliness with intimacy, and,

strangely enough, beauties were apt to lose their freshness, though not perhaps their charm, if you saw them often.

"Your face, for instance, to any one who knows you well, sees you often, might appear quite" — Rose was startled. Was he going to say "plain" or "beautiful"? And which would be complimentary? — "different from what I see it," he ended.

Rose nearly asked him, "How do you see it?" She did really commence "How —" but concluded deftly with "strange!"

He decided on a profile, and got Rose to adjust her seat. He was extremely careful and particular in the smallest details. Rose felt that if care could make a good photograph, she was going to come out well. Very respectfully he guided her, actually, once or twice, touched her head. "May I? — That's it." Then he was a long time under the voluminous folds of a black cloth which he spread over the camera and himself, and took more time shifting the camera about.

"Could you keep like that, do you think?" he asked, emerging.

"Yes," said Rose.

"You can talk, if you don't shift your head," he said, and got one of the darkslides out from under his coat.

He had been so earnest in his work that Rose felt it almost incumbent on her to carry on the con-

versation. "It's a beautiful morning, is n't it?" she offered.

"Rather," he said. "And is n't this a glorious bit of common — just now, I mean, with the leaves turning?"

"And the pond," said Rose.

"Yes. This patch of water 'makes' the view so. Do you often come here, or are you, like most people, so used to a pretty view that you lose its charm?"

"Oh, no," said Rose. "I love this spot, and I often come here."

"Do you? I have n't seen you."

"No; well, you —" She stopped. She had been going to say something awkward.

"I'm afraid I'm driving you away."

"Not in the least," murmured Rose, and felt untruthful.

"Then perhaps I may see you here sometimes?"

This would not do. Rose merely glimmered something indistinct.

He adjusted her head again, and got ready to take off the lens cap. "Quite still, please."

Rose, keeping her head still, suddenly interrupted. "May I speak?"

He took his hand down from the lens. "Certainly."

"My hair?" said Rose. "Is it all right?"

"I think so — it looks splendid," he answered,

with such enthusiasm that Rose felt embarrassed. "Perhaps, after all, you'd like to look in a glass?"

"I should," said Rose.

So, abandoning the photography for the moment, he went into his caravan and brought out — Rose, polite girl as she was, could scarcely help laughing. It was just an irregular bit of mirror, unframed, no bigger than the palm of his hand. "Manage with this?" he asked.

Rose took it, and "managed," adjusted a pin or two, then gave him back the glass. He looked her over carefully as he took it. Rose hoped it looked as nice as she thought it did.

So he took that photograph, and began another. It was a leisurely business, with frequent chats, always interesting, but, Rose saw later, apt to diverge a good deal from the matter in hand. This second photograph was still a profile, with her head lowered this time, and he followed it with a three-quarters face.

Then, to Rose's astonishment, it struck one. She jumped up. "One?" she said.

He looked at his wrist-watch. "One, exactly."

"I must go in," she said.

"I hope I'm not ruining your lunch?" he said politely.

"Not at all. It's cold. But I had no idea the time had gone so." She felt sorry he had got only three views of her. She would have liked the dozen.

"It's a lengthy matter, you know, making a really good photograph. I hope you'll forgive my taking rather a long time over yours," he apologized.

"Not at all," said Rose. "I should like them nicely done."

"Oh, they shall be nice. How long will you be over lunch?"

Rose started. She had not thought of contriving more than one sitting. "I don't quite see —" she began.

"It's an exceptionally favourable day," he assured her. "The light this afternoon will be even better than this morning."

Rose wondered if she could manage it — saw that she could, perhaps — decided that she would. "I could be back by two."

"Capital. I'll cook my kipper and get it out of the way, and be ready."

Rose nodded and went home. She was laughing. "Cook my kipper"! Why not? She had a mental image of him crouched over his fire, with the fish in a frying-pan, or possibly on a fork — somehow it gave her a friendly feeling towards him. It was n't much of a lunch, though. Would it be right or not to offer to supplement it? Or, even, something to drink — a bottle of ale? No (with a momentary shrinking), that incident of the Cuckleford road, on Saturday night! — It was n't true,

but — but, all the same, don't put temptation in his way.

So she had lunch at the Priory, and the caravan man had his at the caravan — it was n't kipper at all; it was quite a comfortable steak — and soon after two she was back at the caravan.

CHAPTER VII

THE business of the afternoon resembled closely that of the morning. Rose and the caravan man certainly got on well. Their conversation roved about a good deal, but it seldom drooped. She found herself insensibly led into something like intimate talk. She chattered about Ouseton, the Priory, Granny, Aunt Anne, herself. And all the while she knew he was taking the greatest pains about her portrait. He posed her with the greatest care, making minute adjustments in her position, altering the poise of her head, getting her once to change the simple arrangement of her hair. Once or twice she seemed suddenly to realize the strangeness, to her, of her situation, spending a whole day in intimate association with a strange man. But even though it seemed almost a duty to have some qualms, she found herself unable to conjure up anything more than a momentary, perfunctory timidity. He did everything so naturally and simply.

Once he himself apologized for allowing or inducing their conversation to flow so unrestrainedly, but he explained that it was part of the craft of a photographer to get a sitter to talk, not too strenuously, on any topic of interest.

A most intelligent photographer, thought Rose, and then in her mind the question shaped, why was he not successful? Obviously he could n't be. Five shillings a dozen — that was no price for a successful photographer. Mr. Bapkin, who was n't anything much at taking pictures, charged a guinea a dozen. And then, this sort of life, gipsyish, really homeless — it meant failure, surely.

She put no question to him, yet he felt himself drawn to explain. "I'm new to this work," he said. "Don't think I shan't do your pictures all right, but I'm something of a novice. Still, before I took this up, I was a painter."

"I suppose this is a better trade than that?" she said.

He was under the cloth, moving about, just then.

He suddenly pulled up, came out from under the cloth and looked at her. "I beg your pardon?" he said.

"Perhaps I'm wrong," said Rose; "and of course you've got to learn all about it. But I suppose, when you really grow competent — no, not that" (hastily) — "confident, I mean, you could make this a more profitable occupation." He still looked questioningly at her. Had she made a mistake? "But perhaps you were a decorator as well?"

He suddenly dived under the cloth again and did not speak for some seconds. Then: "Yes, I've

done a bit of decorative work in my time, but not much." He worked the camera about. "And of course there's the plumbing. There's good money in that."

"What made you give it up and take to this?" she asked.

He lifted the cloth and looked gravely at her. "Do you want any pipes mended at the Priory?"

"I don't think so. Why?"

"Get them done." He pulled out the slide. "Still, please." She sat rigid, he took off the cap, replaced it, turned the slide. "In a few months' time there will be no more plumbing, no more pipes, in England."

"Whyever not?"

"Shortage of solder. The solder mines are giving out . . . But it was n't for that I gave up."

"Perhaps you were ill, and needed an outdoor life?"

"That's it."

"What was the matter with you? Lead poisoning?"

"Yes. And wrist-drop, and painter's colic, and plumber's blue-gum, and — and decorator's jaundice. And locomotor ataxia."

"I've heard of that," said Rose. "What is it?"

"Awful. And almost incurable. Do you know what to do if a locomotor ataxia? Why — run. It's your only chance."

She felt bewildered, but he was under the cloth again.

He got nine more negatives of her that afternoon, between lunch and half-past six. She missed her tea, but later she dared not stop. In fact, she began to get into a bit of a panic. Granny might be home.

As a matter of fact, Granny came home, in the Stickfordleigh carriage, not ten minutes later. She only drove over to see that Rose was all right, the Priory where she had left it that morning, and to get something for Aunt Anne. She would drive back to the Stickfords' to dinner and spend the night.

"Is everything all right, Rose?" she asked.

"Quite, Granny."

"Where is Mary?"

"This was her afternoon off. She went directly after lunch."

"Oh, yes. I hope she has n't been over to that caravan."

"She has n't. I'm sure," said Rose. Deplorable. Here went duty and opportunity hand in hand. She knew it — and said not a word.

Her conscience got busy with her that night as soon as her head was on the pillow. She found herself presenting it with ingenious yet unworthy excuses. "I'm only doing it for a surprise for — for Aunt Anne. I know she'd like a new photograph

of me." "Now, look here," began Conscience; but she would not look. Indeed, she shut her eyes and went to sleep, unconvicted.

Next morning, Rose, breakfasting by herself, chose to sit in her bedroom awhile to do some writing. It was a pleasant room. She had written in it before — once. Seated there she had a beautiful view of the common. The caravan also was an object of interest in the neighbourhood.

She recalled naturally her occupation of the previous afternoon, and hoped that Saturday would bring her photographs as excellent as she imagined they would be. He had taken so much trouble. When one reflected how modern work of every kind was scamped — Aunt Anne often said so — it was pleasant to have given a commission of this kind to a man so conscientiously devoted to his craft. Saturday, she had no doubt, would show results worth his earnest endeavour.

She confessed that she was impatient for Saturday. Saturday morning, no doubt. Ouseton, as is the custom of country villages, became thronged on Saturday afternoons and evenings, and no doubt the caravan man would be there. He would therefore expect her to call on Saturday morning; as likely to be early as late. So that — so that — obviously he would have the prints ready on Friday evening, or, more likely, Friday afternoon. She knew that prints were made in sunlight, the

brighter the better. So that really, if she called on Friday afternoon, say, after tea — before tea was perhaps a little too early — she could probably see what her prints looked like.

She felt great confidence in the caravan man. He had said that he could judge from the negatives whether her prints would be good enough, so that really she could satisfy her mind on the Friday morning. Yes, Friday morning.

Friday morning? But he developed the things at night. He had said so. Just then, happening to glance out of the window, she caught a glimpse of the man himself. She could, as it happened, spy through a sort of tunnel through the trees, and there he was, lying down, luxuriously. Smoking, no doubt.

Now she remembered that he had said he would develop the plates that night — last night. They were done, then. At that very moment he was in a position to tell her whether his and her hopes were justified. No doubt everything was quite all right. But supposing — just supposing they were not? — Mr. Bapkin once had to ask her to sit again. How silly she would feel if she went there on Friday (no, Saturday), and discovered that he had failed! Failure, announced now, could be remedied. She could sit again. Put off learning how things stood, and she might never get the chance.

This young girl acted with a decision older people

might well copy. Did she halt and hesitate, delaying action from sheer inability to move, letting inertia and timidity overmaster initiative? No.

She went over to the caravan.

She arrived there at a quarter past eleven.

Those with a sense of exactitude in time may note that that was precisely a quarter of an hour earlier than her visit of the previous day.

She had not even waited to put on her tam-o'-shanter.

The caravan man jumped up when she came. "Well?" she said. "Are the negatives all right?"

He looked at her uncomfortably. He had to choose the words in which to convey his answer to her question. He dropped his eyes, knocked his pipe out on his hand, put it in his pocket. A dread began to steal across her spirits. She looked anxiously at him.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I hardly know how to tell you. Don't blame me, but — something went wrong with the developer —"

"And what happened?"

He got the word out, the one word she had dreaded to hear.

"Spoilt!"

"All?"

"Every one."

She felt for him. In his voice was a bitterness he strove in vain to conceal. He had been so buoy-

ant, so confident; he had worked so hard, taken such pains, such a long, long time over her — and now —

She must say something. What was it — the right word? the right tone? —

She looked at him as he stood there, downcast, depressed.

"Oh," she said, "I'm so glad I came across."

He looked up, a glad light in his eyes. "Are you?" he said. "Are you really? So am I."

CHAPTER VIII

ONE morning, about a week later, up the pack-horse track, across the main road, and onto the common walked a stout, comfortable-looking man, a large, fat-faced, fat-bellied man, who so unexpectedly and decidedly protruded beneath the waist that he looked as if he had inadvertently swallowed a football, thoroughly well blown-out, at some previous time, and had followed expert advice as to the inadvisability of attempting its removal.

He wore a blue serge suit, very comfortably cut, and yet it was his custom, whenever decent opportunity offered, to leave unbuttoned the top button of his trousers front and the bottom button of his waistcoat. Thus he often displayed a lozenge of shirt at the spot where the front centre line of these two garments met. You knew by this that here was a man with too much sense not to waive appearances when comfort demanded, and you respected him for it. The lozenge of shirt was displayed now, as he crossed the common and halted at the caravan.

The movements of the caravan man that morning, could you have traced them, would have given

you, perhaps, some faint indication of a tendency towards the erratic in his disposition.

He had risen very early, so early, in fact, that he had had to light a candle to dress by. The first flush of dawn was only just showing in the eastern sky when he emerged from his caravan, clad in a pair of white flannel trousers and an ample white wool sweater, whose voluminous folds, encircling his neck and coming well up to the tops of his ears, were welcome enough at that early hour, even though the month was September and every promise in air and sky was of a fine day.

He first went to the pond, where he hauled in and examined a night-line evidently set the evening before. No luck. He re-baited and flung it again into the pond. He then got out from the caravan and rigged up a fishing-rod, baited the line, adjusted a float, and crawling stealthily on hands and knees to another part of the bank, gently lowered his bait into the water. He then lit and smoked a pipe with great satisfaction, and, the sun being now well up in the heavens, lounged on his back on the bank with his hands behind his head. This for at least an hour. Then, apparently startled from a day-dream, he hastily felt that part of his trousers which had borne the major portion of his weight. As might have been expected, these had drunk thirstily of the night-dews, and his grunt of evident discomfort signalled his return from

dreamland to the world of cold — and damp — facts. He examined both his lines again, quite unruffled, apparently, at his continued failure to secure any sort of trophy from the pool's depths, and putting on a fresh bait, left the unfortunate worms he had selected for the job to carry on without his supervision, and wandered away across the common. He went at a steady tramp, smoking his pipe, swashing a gorse bush from time to time with the rough hazel stick he carried, and pausing occasionally to make an imaginary frame in the air with his hands, through which he surveyed portions of the landscape.

Somewhere between five and six o'clock he was back at his caravan. He again examined his fishing lines, rejected a small and too adventurous carp which had essayed a flirtation with one of the worms (it was foul-hooked), released the worm from further duty, yoked another miserable in the toils in its place, and set about making a fire of sticks a yard or two away from the caravan. He then breakfasted on tea, two eggs, a sardine on bread, an apple, and what looked like some peppermint-drops which he found loose in his trousers pocket. He then clambered into his caravan and went to sleep.

Some hours later he suddenly appeared at the door of the caravan, yawned, ambled down the steps, put fresh sticks on his fire, hung in the

flames on a tripod a round iron pot which he filled at the pond. From the caravan he brought out a shaving-mug and brush, and when the water in the iron pot was hot he filled the mug, beat up the soap, and commenced to lather his face preparatory to a shave. A slight, perhaps fancied, movement of his float, just visible over the tops of the reeds in the pond, caught his eye. He flew lightly over, seized the butt of his rod and struck. Again no luck; the float and line jerked upward, the hook settled gracefully among the branches of the overhanging tree, and laughingly beckoned him to other pastime. Adopting one only of the short selection of appropriate remarks fisherman's custom has compiled for use on such occasions, he proceeded, standing on tiptoe, to disentangle his hook — no easy job. He had succeeded, had cast to the winds of heaven the dilapidated remains of the worm, a silent but not quite passive participant in the amusement of the moment, when a rapping noise from the caravan caught his ear, and looking up, he discovered that the day had already brought him visitors.

He picked up his shaving-mug and brush and went over.

"Hullo," said he.

Mr. George Gubbins and Miss Dorothy Doubledaisy turned at his greeting.

"'Marnin'," said Mr. Gubbins, and Dorothy nodded.

"'Morning," responded the caravan man — and kept a grave face.

Dorothy was a plump country maiden, grey-eyed, rosy-faced, clear-skinned, an appetizing morsel, with a great bun of red hair on her neck, red arms, displayed to the elbows, thick ankles, and the finest of fine teeth. She was dressed for a wedding; doubt of that was impossible in face of the evidence of her white cotton gloves, her dress, donned for the first time, of silk, something between grey and lavender in hue, and a huge bouquet of flowers of all kinds, roses, marigolds, sweet-william, verbena — and lots and lots of maidenhair fern.

A wedding, yes — but in that case, what did Mr. Gubbins in that galley? For Mr. Gubbins was dressed in weeds of woe — an ample black broadcloth frock-coat, a waistcoat to match, a pair of rather tight-cut trousers, also black, a large black bow at his neck, emerging from under a broad turned-down starched collar, and a very tall silk hat, round which was draped, one might almost say festooned, a voluminous scarf of crape, which soared in front, even above the level of the roof of the hat, and was caught into a cunning rosette at the back, from which the ends drooped onto his shoulder.

He was a sandy man, with freckles. He wore short side-whiskers and his hair, a trifle thin, perhaps, was brushed well forward over his ears. In

the crook of his left elbow rested one of Dorothy's gloved hands, in his right hand was clutched an umbrella, black, ivory-handled, and of a majesty of proportion that could lend dignity, even gravity, to any human occasion. It was this umbrella whose rapping had interrupted the fishing. The caravan man looked expectant.

"We wants our photos took," explained Mr. Gubbins.

"And a beautiful picture you'll make," said the caravan man confidently.

Dorothy unfolded the situation further, with pretty shyness and dignity conjoined. "Us be goin' to be married."

"To be what?" said the caravan man. "To be ma— Oh, no, no!" He appealed to Mr. Gubbins. "Don't tell me that. Not in those — not in that suit, surely!"

"Just as we are," said Mr. Gubbins. "Not that these be my ch'ice, mind 'ee, but I ain't got no ch'ice, have I, Dolly?"

"No, Jarge," said Dolly, a faint wrinkle in her brow. "But it don't matter."

"She don't mind, so I don't," said Mr. Gubbins. "It's to oblige my fust wife."

"Well," responded the caravan man heartily, "I must say you're a very obliging man. If I might say so, there's even something of generosity about it."

"Don't you mistake me," said Mr. Gubbins with a touch of bitterness. "I ain't doin' it because I want to. Ye see, she owned the watercreese beds, down by the canal, and when she died last Michaelmas, she left it in her will that if I got married again before the year was out it was to be in the same clo'es as I buried her in."

"I take it," said the caravan man, "that you followed the usual custom and performed the last sad rites before ascertaining the final disposition of her worldly goods?"

"If you mean," said Mr. Gubbins, "did we bury her fust and read her will arterwards, yus, we did. Ef I'd 'a' known what she'd wrote down," he continued, "I'd 'a' gone to her berryin' in something a bit more sporty than this get-up." He examined his trousers with distaste. "But there, that was 'er, to the life. Always a spoil-sport."

"Not without a sense of humour, I fancy," suggested the caravan man.

"You oughter known 'er. Why, Sunday arter she died Parson in pulpit give it out that one of our little community well known to us all 'ad been released from this earthly purgatory, and 'er own mother as was a-settin' in the pew next to me leans over an' ses, 'Does 'e mean 'er, Jarge, or you?'"

"Well, I don't mind, Jarge. I'm marryin' you and not your trousers, so hurry up, young man."

Dorothy Doubledaisy was properly businesslike. "Besides, there's an 'am b'ilin'."

"A what?" asked the caravan man, pardonably puzzled.

"An 'am," explained Mr. Gubbins. "You know what an 'am is, don't you?"

"Oh, an 'am — I see. Quite, quite. Good luck to it. Very well; just go over there, will you?" — he indicated the roots of the beech tree sprawling round his caravan wheels — "and look your loveliest while I get the machine ready."

He dived inside, the door closed, red blinds were pulled down over the windows, and after a minute or so he came out, bearing his camera on its feeble legs, a folded black cloth under one arm, a double darkslide under the other. With these he edged his uneasy way down the caravan steps, and proceeded to make the necessary disposition of the apparatus of his trade.

It took some little time, and in correct professional manner he engaged his patrons with chat of a light and agreeable nature.

"So you two are going to make the great adventure together, eh?"

"For better, for wuss," quoted Mr. Gubbins with great satisfaction.

Dolly nudged him meaningly. "You could n't be much wuss than you was Sat'dy before last, Jarge," she murmured.

For all her maiden shyness, the caravan man thought he could detect in the tones of her voice a tinge of reproof that later would not be content to stop at the merely remonstrative. Possibly — so subtle are the instincts of self-preservation in man inclined to pleasant error — Mr. Gubbins's ear caught the same note.

"Could n't I? That's all you know," he answered Dorothy with conviction.

"Let's hope not," intervened the caravan man from under his black cloth.

"What do you know about it?" demanded Mr. Gubbins. "Was you there?"

"Was I there!" repeated the caravan man, coming out from under his cloth, doing something to the front of the camera, and diving under the cloth again. "Was I there! — Was n't I one of the three good men that brought you home from the Pink and Lily after closing-time?"

"I did n't know — I s'pose I did n't know much about anything. Much obliged."

"Not a bit. A pleasure, I assure you."

"Was I singin'?" asked Mr. Gubbins.

The caravan man, again coming into view, breathed thoughtfully on his lens and began to polish it with his handkerchief.

"Singing?" he answered. "Well, I don't know that I should exact —" He broke off the thread of that speech and spun another. "Singing? —

rather! You were the brightest little skylark I've heard for many a long time."

"Singin'," said Mr. Gubbins, "is a nabbit of mine."

"A what?"

"A nabbit — you know what a nabbit is, don't you?"

"Oh! an 'abit — I beg your pardon. It's a captivating habit, at times."

"Down at the Pink and Lily," continued Mr. Gubbins, "they give me credit for havin' something of a v'ice."

"I don't think," rejoined the caravan man, "that that's doing quite the square thing by you."

"Why not? — Whatd'yer mean?" asked Mr. Gubbins.

"Giving credit in public-houses has long been recognized as a dangerous custom," answered the caravan man, "and if, as in your case, it is in open encouragement of an admitted vice —"

"'Ere!" said Mr. Gubbins. "Who are you gettin' at? I'm 'arf a mind not to have my photo took, arter all."

"Come, come," said the caravan man soothingly, "we must n't disappoint the lady. Let's get on with it." His camera was now apparently adjusted to his liking. He came over and urged both Dorothy and Mr. Gubbins towards the shade of the beech tree. "I think," he said reflectively, "I

think we will pose the group in the accepted fashion. The lady sits — just here, will you, madam? — and the gentleman stands a little behind her — a simple but effective arrangement."

Mr. Gubbins suddenly disclosed a quite violent objection to the suggestion, despite its effectiveness and simplicity.

"I bain't goin' to have her in front o' me. I bain't goin' to stand behind any wumman."

He meant it. The caravan man essayed persuasion. "I quite understand your feeling, sir, but the world belongs to women nowadays. Better give in without a struggle." He came suddenly across.

"Let me take your umbrella." He annexed it, and leant it against the caravan wheel.

Mr. Gubbins started forward. "'Ere, gimme my umberella. I wants that took as well."

"Oh, not the umberella, Jarge!" Dorothy Doubledaisy interposed.

Mr. Gubbins was roused. His blood was up. "Then I ain't goin' to be photoed — and what's more, I ain't goin' to be married."

"There now!" Dorothy was almost in tears. She turned despairingly to the photographer. "Young man, let him have his umberella."

"Certainly, by all means. I'll let him have mine as well."

Fresh grievance. Mr. Gubbins, firmly grasping

the large ivory handle of his own umbrella, turned with renewed wrath on the photographer. "'Oo arst you for your umberella?"

"I proffered it," answered the caravan man, considerably taken aback, "in the kindliest spirit."

Mr. Gubbins refused to be placated. "'Oo's payin' for this photograph?"

Dorothy let a slow tear drip down one rosy cheek. "Oh, Jarge," she faltered, "do let's get on. Think of the 'am."

Perhaps Mr. Gubbins thought of the ham. Though his words were spirited enough, a suggestion of placability came into his tones. He addressed Dolly. "If he thinks he's goin' to stick his umberella into a photograph I pays for, I wunt get married."

"Oh, Jarge!" A heart of very stone could not resist an appeal in such a voice.

The caravan man seized the moment to obliterate all possible offence. "Sir," he said, "I withdraw my umbrella. I apologize."

Mr. Gubbins's face cleared as does the April sky after a shower. He seized the hand of the caravan man and shook it heartily. "You means no 'arm," he conceded handsomely. "Coom down and see us this arternoon when the 'am's b'iled." He continued to shake hands affectionately.

"Oh, Jarge," said Dolly, "do let's get on."

"Yes," said the caravan man, "do let's get on.

Perhaps you'd sit, and let the lady stand by your side, close —"

"Tell you what, Dolly," — Mr. Gubbins knew how to be magnanimous in victory — "you shall set aside me, close up."

The two sat happily down on one of the tree-roots.

"Hold the umberella well forward," directed the photographer. He dived in under his black cloth, came out again, twisted Dolly's head a little to one side, dived under again, and again came out, lifted Mr. Gubbins's head a little, assumed the cloth again —

At just that moment the fat-faced, fat-bellied man finished his journey across the common and arrived at the caravan.

He pulled up short, his eye ran over the group of two — perhaps, seeing the importance attached to the umbrella, we had better say group of three — on the tree-root, then he surveyed the caravan man, or rather, his white-trousered legs, which were all that was to be seen of him, moving obscurely about, enveloped in the focusing cloth and mingling with the attenuated legs of the camera. The fat man perpended these legs for a second or two, then with the hooked handle of the light cane he carried he hooked up some of the folds of the cloth, as if a larger field of view might resolve a present perplexity. This apparently was the case.

He unhooked his cane handle, let the cloth drop, moved a pace or two backwards and, "Bamfield!" he exclaimed, with great earnestness. "Good Heavens, Bamfield! —"

At his voice there was a convulsion of the black cloth, and the caravan man suddenly started from underneath it. His eyes fell on the fat man, and the two stood for a second staring intently at one another. Then a slight flush overspread the face of the caravan man, and he spoke loudly and aggressively: —

"One at a time," he said, "if you please, sir. And kindly note that my name is Jones."

Apparently the fat man's astonishment was too great to allow of the proper assimilation of this direction, for he answered, "Good Heavens! it is — yes, it is Bamfield! Bammy, old man —"

"Jones, please; Jones," said the caravan man. Under his breath he added, "Shut up, you fool," and turning his back on the fat man proceeded with his professional task.

He addressed the couple sitting on the tree-roots. "We must have a smile," he said. Dorothy smiled. The caravan man smiled acknowledgment. The convulsive writhing of Mr. Gubbins's face, however, failed to please him. "Oh, no," he remonstrated, "not that — not that —" He thought for a moment. "Perhaps, after all, it will be as well if the gentleman does n't smile." Mr. Gub-

bins relaxed his efforts. "Just look natural," suggested the caravan man. Mr. Gubbins's face commenced another and still more distressing series of muscular acrobatics. "Oh, well," said the man at the camera, resignedly, "Still, please." He put his hand to the cap of the lens.

Instantly Mr. Gubbins shot from his seat. "'Old 'ard," said he. "What's this goin' to cost?"

The caravan man replaced the loosened lens cap. "The charge for one dozen cabinet prints, vignetted sepia-toned, on plain mounts, will be seven shillings and sixpence."

"Seven-and-six!" Mr. Gubbins was openly annoyed. He turned on Dorothy Doubledaisy. "Why did you tell I foive shillin's?"

"I thart it was foive shillin's," was all Dorothy could offer.

The photographer explained quite lucidly. "Five shillings is the charge for a single sitter. In the case of a group of two an extra charge of half-a-crown is made."

There seemed, one would say, nothing not entirely reasonable in this explanation, but Mr. Gubbins's native obstinacy was of a sort to resist mere reason. "I bain't goin' to pay more'n five shillin's," he announced.

"Oh, Jarge!" expostulated Dorothy.

"Come," persuaded the caravan man, "come; I'm throwing in the umbrella for nothing."

"You art to," returned Mr. Gubbins, unmoved. "'E don't occupy a seat, do 'e?"

"Oh, Jarge!" said Dorothy again. Mr. Gubbins was obdurate.

The caravan man vacated his entrenchments unreservedly, and with a touch of grace. "A moment. The occasion is no ordinary one. Allow me to contribute to its felicity by waiving my usual extra charge. The group of two shall cost five shillings only."

"Right!" said Mr. Gubbins. He smiled broadly, grasped the hand of the caravan man and shook it heartily. "Coom down this evenin', when the 'am's cut."

"Expect me," said the caravan man. "But now, let's get on. As you were." Dorothy and Jarge seated themselves again. "Ah, that's something like a smile this time — Now, ready! Steady!" The cap was lifted, the happy pair sat like rocks, the cap was replaced. "Right," said the caravan man. "Prints ready on Saturday." He shook hands with them both heartily, considered Dorothy's rosy face for a second, decided rapidly that perhaps he had better not try it on. "Good luck!"

"Coom down to-night," said Mr. Gubbins, "when the 'am's cold. Ye know my place — the watercreese beds, down t'other side o' the canal. It'll be a fine 'am."

"I should n't wonder," said the caravan man.

Dorothy nodded and smiled, Mr. Gubbins drew her arm through his, waved his umbrella, and maid and swain moved off to where the spire of Ouseton church peered meaningly at them across the common.

The caravan man now whipped round on the fat man, who, during the operation of taking the photograph, had stood a little away, his pipe, fireless and foul, projecting from between firmly compressed lips. "Now, sir," said the caravan man breezily, "it's a beautiful morning for having your photograph taken. May I have the pleasure? Five shillings a dozen only, and no waiting. Have every confidence, sir. I guarantee a likeness — if that's any inducement in your case. My name," he went on, "is Jones, George Jones, artist in photography. Wedding groups and funerals a specialty. Babies barred." The fat man continued to chew his pipe-stem, and regard him with expressionless face. The caravan man gave it up. He extended his hand.

"Monkey, how are you?" he said.

His greeting was one of cordiality, not of derision. The fat man shook heartily the hand held out to him. "Well, Bammy," he said, "here you are, then."

"Yes, here I am," said the caravan man. There was just a touch of defiance, a hint of "Well, what about it?" in his manner.

The other filled his pipe again and sat down leisurely on the caravan steps, looking him over and smiling. Then:—

"You are a fathead, you know, Bammy," he said earnestly.

"I don't see it," said the caravan man.

"Yes, you do. We heard about it — up in Scotland, were n't you? — going about in this precious caravan, taking photos and painting landscape. What's it mean? What's your idiotic idea?"

"What's wrong with it?"

"My dear boy, why need you ask? Now, look here; why is it? We all want to know. You slog away, harder than most of us, at your proper work — figure, nudes. You give us to understand that you intend to be the only pebble on the beach in that line. You sweat at it year after year. And then —"

"Well?"

"Well, you hop it in a caravan. And here you are taking photos and painting landscape — *landscape*, mark you! A thing any mug can do! Silly ass!"

"I suppose I can drop figure and go in for landscape, if I want to?"

"My dear lad, you can open an eel-pie shop if you want to. It's a free country."

"But supposing I find I can work more steadily at landscape?"

"Work — work!" The fat man eyed him with pitying scorn. "Are we artists?"

The caravan man evidently fretted under this questioning. He began to pace about.

"I — I'm ambitious," he said — said it with a touch of apology, as does any decent Englishman forced to disclose anything of serious inner feelings. "I want to be one of the big men."

"You will be."

"Well, but — old man — I mean one of the men who are — are always going to be big — to count. Sometimes I feel I can — that I've got it in me, that everything's inside me that's necessary, and all I've got to do now is work — and work damned hard, mind you. It can't be done without that, Monk."

The other nodded. "But why not stick to the nude, your proper work? There's not another man living can paint skin as you can."

"Well, the nude's too — distracting. You start with an abnormal appreciation of that variety of beauty; you train hand and eye and brain on it, year after year, till it's an obsession; your whole life is filled with the sense of the beauty of a beautiful woman — and everything else is of no importance."

"Well?"

"Well, if you're human — and you can't paint that sort of thing unless you are — it's the devil's own job to work steadily."

"Oho!" said the fat man, sucking his pipe reflectively.

"And you find the world full of it — full of lovely feminine things full of grace and charm and inspiration — and — and — distraction — and good-bye, work, and where are we now? You know it can't go on, Monkey. I just thought it all out, bought this caravan, shut up my studio and went in for landscape."

"As I said before, silly ass!"

"No, Monk. I'm right. It's been splendid training in lots of ways. When you've worked at landscape and learned the charm that lies in trees and skies — water — this sort of thing" — he indicated the broad sweep of the common — "you get the point of view for every sort of beauty. You can fill yourself with the sense of a woman's loveliness and still be safe."

The fat man chuckled. "Now, that's a long-felt want. It's what the world's been waiting for ever since Adam told Eve he preferred her as she used to be."

The other stopped his peregrinations. "Think of a woman's hair — the marvel of it — when a great thick curve of it comes welling over her ear! And her skin — the colour, the texture — you see it on her face and hands and neck, and it makes you wonder what she'd be like — and when she turns her head over her shoulder, or stoops, or

bends — the living line that flies all along the edge of her — Gods, is n't she fine!"

"And who's the lady?" queried the fat man in a matter-of-fact tone.

The caravan man came back from his rhapsody. "Oh, I'm speaking in the abstract. Well, what I feel is that I could paint that sort of thing now without qualms. I could go back to my old studio at Primrose Hill — I still keep it on — and take up figure again. But this life gets hold of one. Fifteen months of it, rambling about, dressing anyhow, consulting no one — it's ideal."

Monk refilled his pipe. "You'll come back to figure, Bamfield. What about your landscape? Sells, I suppose?"

"I don't sell it." Bamfield began to pace about again; "I'm painting to please myself — and damn the dealers!"

"Certainly — damn the dealers, damn them all. I'm with you there," agreed Monk. "But our unfortunate profession —"

"And damn the profession! Art should be amateur — all the arts — music, painting, drama, literature. Work at 'em for the love of them, but never for money."

"And how do we live?" queried Monk, open-eyed.

"Get your living at anything else — never at creative work of that sort. I take photographs."

"Proper photographs?"

Bamfield walked into his caravan, came out with a handful of prints and offered them for inspection. Monk stared at him, aghast. "You know, Bamfield, you are absolutely the limit!"

Bamfield was warming to his theme now. "You know, Monkey, we artists build a temple of pure fancy to dwell in, and there we minister to our idols, our dreams."

"I don't, dear boy — believe me, I do not," said Monk solemnly.

"We rage," went on Bamfield, "because when we've painted something fine, most of us have to chaffer with swine who will see only money in our loveliest efforts."

Monk grinned. "They won't always do that, even, will they? Blast 'em!"

"Well, but it's an invigorating thing for a man of imaginative temperament to be brought into occasional contact with earth. So just for the tonic of the thing, I earn my living as I go, at photography. Five bob a dozen. And another splendid thing, it's cured me of this cursed inspiration."

Monk felt bewildered. "Cured you of —" he began weakly.

"Inspiration" — Bamfield laid down the law — "like the artistic temperament, is a fraud, a mere excuse for being damnably lazy and doing about a quarter of a proper man's work."

"Here, don't give our snug little trade away!"

"Sometimes, when I'm ready to start a canvas, some fat old frump turns up in her best velvet frock and wants to be 'took.' In the old days, when I rather cultivated being a sensitive creature, that would have put me off work for six weeks, but now I take her photo, I take her five bob, and I go on with my painting like a proper craftsman."

"Like a plumber."

Bamfield ignored the comment. "I'm a craftsman. And art will flourish, and great ideals will live in England once again, when every artist learns to make himself a sane and healthy workman." He broke off and came back to earth. "What are you sniggering at?"

Monk knocked out his pipe, put it into his pocket, rose, and, making his cap into a bag, proceeded to collect coins from an imaginary crowd, smiling ingratiatingly as he did so.

"Thank you, sir — and you, sir. Thank you, miss. Brother Bamfield will repeat his highly humorous address this evening, on the beach, close to the pier." He surveyed Bamfield with good-humoured scorn. "My lad," he went on, with real good-nature, "I've a bit of news for you. You've arrived!" He delivered his information with a profound sense of the dramatic effect of simplicity.

To his evident astonishment, the caravan man replied with equal simplicity, "I know I have."

"The critics have found you out, the people who buy have found you out, Bamfield. The *Daily Mail*—" He broke off. "You know!—what do you mean?"

"I mean," said Bamfield, "that I am fully aware that I can now sell whatever I paint at my own price. I've known it for the last three months. Know how I found out? Remember Iffelstein?" The other nodded. "Twice he came hunting me out to let him have stuff. I wondered why. I went up to town and made enquiries—and I found out. They want me—at last!" He stretched himself luxuriously.

"And do you know where our friend Iffelstein is now? I came down part of the way in his car. He's hunting round the far side of the common for you, and I was to meet him and bring him along if I found you."

"Then go and stop him! Stop him, Monk, or there'll be murder. When I think of the way that swine used to sweat me—Bring him here and I'll drown him in this pond."

"Good Lord, Bammy, don't be a fool! Come back to London. Fame's waiting for you."

"Let it wait" (with a magnificent gesture). "I've waited long enough. I'm in no hurry. This life's a joy. I'm waiting for canvases and in the meantime I've picked out some lovely little bits round here that simply cry to be painted."

"Did this one cry much?" asked Monk suddenly.

Bamfield stared.

Monk held out a number of the prints he had taken from the packet Bamfield had submitted. "Lovely little bits! — and this is one of 'em, I suppose?"

Bamfield strode across and grabbed the pile of prints. "That? — Oh, that should n't be there."

Monk shook his head sourly. "I see. The long and short of it is you're going to get mixed up with a wife."

"Whose wife?"

"Don't frivol. Bamfield, old man, don't do it. Remember what we've agreed on so often — the man who proposes to a girl till he's known her intimately for at least twenty years is a fool, and the artist who gets married under any circumstances whatever is a criminal."

"I know. But, my dear Monk, — Oh, it's absurd. What should I want with a wife? — I've got a carpet-sweeper."

The fat man started up as if stung. "I knew it — I guessed it! A carpet-sweeper! — first symptoms of the nesting instinct. I've seen it in other sufferers. Oh, Bamfield, beware. A man begins with an innocent carpet-sweeper, and before he knows where he is, he finds himself landed with a house full of furniture and a wife."

Bamfield paced away impatiently. "Monk, don't

worry. You know my sweetheart, my one and only mistress, the little girl painted on my studio wall. Nothing lives that's half so sweet as she looks. Forever my only love!" He struck a pose, hand on heart.

"Pah!" Monk was bitterly incredulous. "Well, God forgive you. Might have been a great painter" — he addressed the landscape generally — "but got married. I'm off. I'm not wanted here. I may be intruding. Where's Iffelstein? — I'll meet him and take him away, since we're too swell-headed to listen to reason. Bammy," he interrupted himself suddenly, "mind she don't humbug you."

"Oh, shut up!" said Bamfield testily.

"Do you know what's going to happen to you — may have happened for all you know? Do you know anything of Lord Bamfylde? No relation of his, are you?"

"None at all. Never heard of him. Why?"

"He spells his name with a 'y,' but I thought you might be in the family. He's one of these nature-study men, the new sport, goes about in a caravan, with a camera, snapshotting birds, beasts, and fishes, all-alive-oh! Now, supposing this 'lovely little bit' of yours has been a bit too smart for once, and has mistaken you for his lordship —"

"But why?"

"Why, you duffer? — D' you suppose they haven't paragraphed him in the papers? Look at

the chance for a muddle. Wandering individual, caravan, photography, same name —"

"No," said Bamfield. "I've told you once — my name is Jones."

"What for?"

"Iffelstein's doing. The beggar hunted after me steadily, and I dodged him by dropping Bamfield and taking to Jones."

"Well, he's got you now, for all that."

"Has he! Well, then, Monk, stop him. Do you want to see me swung by the neck?"

"Can't say — it might be for the best," said the other malevolently.

"Oh, go and stop him, Monk. Tell him he's a dead man if he comes here."

"Keep calm, keep calm," said Monk. "I'll explain." He moved away past the caravan. "Bammy," he said, suddenly stopping, "have you really, *really* let yourself in for a carpet-sweeper?"

With an air of lofty condescension the caravan man went up the steps and came down with an undeniable carpet-sweeper. He handed it to the fat man, who took it silently.

"Bamfield," he said, "let me have it. Let me take it away. Let me — let me cut the plague spot out. It may hurt, but one slash of the surgeon's knife, and all risk of the infection spreading is over."

Bamfield hastily grabbed his carpet-sweeper.

"Out of it!" he commanded. "I know you and your dirty old studio. Buy your own carpet-sweeper, or pinch some one else's. Let it alone, or —" He held it up threateningly.

Monk made a despairing movement of his hands, and lumbered away. "I warned you," he said, solemnly and simply.

Bamfield put his thumb to his nose and spread his fingers out. Monk, sadness in the line of his dejected shoulders, moved off through the trees.

Bamfield suddenly hailed him. "Monkey!" Monk pulled up and looked back. "Look us up!" called Bamfield. Monk waved a hand and went on.

Bamfield put the carpet-sweeper down against the caravan steps, went over to his fire and stirred it. The kettle swinging over the blaze immediately spat into his shoes. He hopped, blessed the kettle, picked up a shaving-pot which lay there, tipped some boiling water into it, mixed up a lather with the brush, and began to lather himself.

He heard the swift movement of a skirt near him, turned his head — there was Rose Nieugente.

Up he jumped, pot in one hand, brush in the other, his face a smother of lather. He offered Rose first the right hand, with the brush, then the left hand, with the pot. Then he tucked the brush into the pot and began to wipe the lather off.

Rose, however, was too charged with an errand of importance to take heed of his appearance. She

was breathless with concern and with hurry. She had run all the way from the Priory.

Aunt Anne had come home the previous night. Her ankle had been quite well for a few days, but the Stickfords had kept her with them. It was her temperament to look for the discovery of something gone awry during any prolonged absence of hers, but she was unprepared for what she gathered before she went to bed that night.

Do you imagine Rose's visits to the caravan had been entirely unobserved? Other windows besides that of Rose's room looked towards the spot on which the caravan was resting. Not a word had escaped the properly trained serving-maids, but the establishment at the Priory, ignorant of anything but an outline of the circumstances, were agog with the discovery that Miss Rose was having what must surely be a most elaborate photograph or series of photographs taken by the caravan man. The maids were but women; they had undoubtedly a liking for Rose, but — news is news; the acting head of the household was back, demanding information; here was matter for disclosure — It all came out.

Rose, brought to book, found an unexpected courage. "Why, what was wrong? I wanted a photograph; I don't think much of Bapkin; this man was handy, and he's very cheap." Aunt Anne was taken considerably aback at being faced in

this way. "Five shillings a dozen," said Rose. "It was absurdly cheap. And then, I could n't very well go far from the Priory. I was in charge. You said I was to keep an eye on the maids —"

"Do you call that keeping an eye on them, spending day after day over there? Whatever were you doing?"

"Sitting," replied Rose.

"All that time?"

"Yes."

"For five shillings?"

"He had bad — he was n't successful. Perhaps he does n't know much about photographing — perhaps that's why he was so cheap."

Of course the interview between Rose and her aunt had much more in it than that, but that was its essence.

"You understand," said Aunt Anne. "No more of it. I'll have an end put to this. I'll see the man myself, directly after breakfast. Does a man of that class imagine that he can spread his demoralizing influence broadcast in this locality? Ah-huh, he'll find his mistake when I talk to him. I'm surprised at you, Rose — I'm shocked. But there! we know where this sort of thing comes from." She had a habit of winding up like that. Rose usually hung her head. To-night — it was just before bedtime — strange to say, she lifted it, and stared at Aunt Anne very hard. Aunt Anne almost

fancied for a moment that the child intended to "answer" her. If she did, she changed her mind, and marched out of the room to her own.

Rose heard Aunt Anne and Granny, who had gone to bed before her daughter's arrival home the night before, and who breakfasted in bed that morning, holding a long conversation after breakfast downstairs was finished. Then Rose was sent for. The conversation of the previous night was repeated almost *verbatim*, with Granny's voice intervening at frequent intervals.

When she was allowed to go, Rose went downstairs, and into the rose-garden, now losing much of its summer beauty. The caravan man was going to catch it. It was too bad. He ought to be warned. If he knew, perhaps he would run away. Rose did not want him to — but still, was it fair to leave him in ignorance of what the next hour held for him?

The end of it was that she swept down on the caravan man herself, before Aunt Anne had cleared off the first of her household supervisory duties.

"Look out!" said Rose.

"What for?" demanded Bamfield.

"I've come to warn you."

"What for?"

"My Aunt Anne's coming."

"What for?"

"To see you."

"What for?"

"She's going to give you a talking to."

"What for?" He clasped his hands nervously together. "Save me!" he said, a tremor of appeal in his voice. "What have I done?"

"It's about my coming here so often," explained Rose. She looked over her shoulder through the trees the way she had come. The coast apparently was clear, and she proceeded: "My Aunt Anne came home from Stickfordleigh last night, and — and — there's been a lot of talk, at breakfast, and after . . . You know, my photographs do seem to have taken rather a long time, don't they?"

"Well, but that's quite easily explainable." Bamfield proceeded to explain. "You were good enough to patronize me, and I've had shocking luck. There you have it — just luck. Sometimes I might have taken half a dozen plates from each of twenty sitters without a single mishap, but it just so happens — it does just so happen at times —" He looked appealingly at Rose.

"I quite understand," she said good-naturedly.

"I was sure you would," he said gratefully. "You see, you were good enough to patronize me, and things began to go wrong. There are so many ways in which photographs go wrong. Let me see — last Wednesday, was n't it, that you sat for the first time?"

"All day," said Rose.

"Ah, but then, you were my first sitter in the neighbourhood, and naturally I had to make rather a special job of you."

"Is that quite honest?" asked Rose doubtfully.

"I'll be frank — it is n't," conceded Bamfield with an air of revealing a past full of dark deeds, and an implied appeal for tender consideration. "But the photographer, caught in the toils of a grinding commercialism, is forced to discard, in the struggle for existence, all the finer instincts of his nature, and to adopt methods that in his better moments revolt his soul. I admit," he went on, appealing eyes on hers, — "I admit that it was my intention to turn out, at five shillings a dozen, some photographs of you that would honestly be worth at least ten shillings. Miss Rose, forgive me. I confess it. I intended to use you as an advertisement in the neighbourhood."

"Well, I don't think you ought to," answered Rose; "and from what you told me you don't seem to have got much advertisement out of me. After all my sittings on Wednesday you did n't get a good photograph of me, did you?"

"Something went wrong with the developer," said Bamfield.

"And on Thursday, I think you said something went wrong with the plates," said Rose.

"And on Friday something went wrong with the — with the —"

"The darkslide, was n't it? I must say, you have had bad luck."

"Shocking. And on Saturday something went wrong with the lens, and on Sunday you did n't come."

"I did, in the afternoon."

"Well, you would n't sit, on a Sunday, so that was another day wasted."

"And on Monday — what went wrong on Monday?"

"I don't remember, but I know it was something. And yesterday, I managed for the first time to get something reasonable; but I was thinking that if you could spare the time, I —"

Splash!

From the pond came a loud smack, a flat, crisp, sudden concussion as of water smitten decidedly. Had Rose, making for the caravan that morning, looked at it instead of at Bamfield, she would possibly have seen a large fat man working his way unostentatiously round the caravan towards the carpet-sweeper leaning against the steps. He saw Rose, and immediately dodged back behind the nearest tree. From behind this tree he was a spectator of the meeting between Rose and the caravan man. They were, he noted, earnestly engaged, and very soon he decided that a trifling precaution in the matter of approach should put him in safe possession of what he sought. He came from be-

hind the tree, stepped behind the caravan, dropped not too easily on hands and knees, and began to crawl under it. He bumped his head on the hind spring, he scraped his back rather painfully on the front axle, but worming forward undaunted, he reached out and secured the carpet-sweeper. Backing noiselessly, he stood up with his prize, peered round the caravan to see the two by the fire still busily engaged with each other, eyed the pond, swung the carpet-sweeper —

Bamfield and Rose, moved by the same instinct, turned their faces towards the pond. All the blood of the sportsman roused in him, Bamfield forgot Rose Nieugente, forgot the foreshadowed advent of Miss Grampette, lost consciousness, in fact, of almost everything in the world not connected with that sudden smack on the water, and the slowly widening ripples urging their slow circles across the smooth surface of the pond. One spring, and he was at the water's edge. Rose was after him a second later. The fat man, wondrous nimble, was safely in hiding on hands and knees behind a gorse-bush not twenty feet away.

"Got him!" gasped Bamfield, stooped, grasped his rod, struck — he turned a blank face to Rose. "No, I have n't," he said, crestfallen. Not a question as to his failure. The line came placidly up, never a suggestion of a bend in the slender top-joint of the rod. "He's got off," he continued.

"I don't think he was ever on," laughed Rose. "What are you after? — old Mouldy Methuselah?"

"I don't know the gentleman's name," answered Bamfield, "but I seem to recognize the implied description. It's a fish, species unknown, but of a simply enormous size, the kind, in fact, that always gets away."

"I know," said Rose; "that's the one. Old Mouldy Methuselah he's always called. Well, you may as well give up. You'll never catch him. He's the aborigine of this place, the oldest inhabitant. I dare say the Romans fished for him when they were here."

"I'm no ignorant Roman," interrupted Bamfield.

"Well, everybody about here has done his best, but they say he knows more about fishing than any man. I've heard people say that one of these days old Methuselah will take it into his head to start fishing for men, and then — look out!"

Bamfield all this time was selecting and adjusting a fresh worm. "I have no wish to boast," he remarked, "but I will merely ask you to defer judgment for a time. I content myself for the present with pointing out that I have set myself the task of landing Gloomy Jeroboam. I may possibly have something to report in a day or so." Stooping cautiously on hands and knees, he began

to lower the bait into the pond. It needed both skill and care to manœuvre it into the exact spot he desired to reach, and engrossed on this task, he lost touch for a second or so with Rose. He did not therefore see her sudden start, her swift step backwards, her fleet disappearance behind the shelter of the caravan, nor catch the word of warning flung hastily at him, "My aunt — here she comes! I must hide!" Unconscious of the loss of his auditor, he continued complacently to address her over his shoulder.

"I concede Musty Ezekiel all the artfulness you claim for him; I merely put forward the proposition that the brain of man is superior to that of a fish, and a contest between the two can end only in one way. Of course, if you treat fishing as a mere lark, you are inviting disappointment. I tell you what" — he had now adjusted his line in the pond as he wanted it — "don't you think we might get hold of a day's fishing together? Don't you think that would be awfully jolly?" He turned as he spoke, to address Rose directly —

So far, nothing in this story has offered any direct description of Aunt Anne. In brief it may be said here that Miss Grampette — Anne Grampette — was tall, forty-seven, and stood no nonsense from anybody. Bamfield felt that at the first glance.

"Good-morning," he said. "Er — excuse me — er — but — it's a little embarrassing —"

"Not in the least," said Anne Grampette. "Nothing," she added, "embarrasses me." This was nearly true.

"I meant me," explained Bamfield, resigning himself to the inevitable. "You want to speak to me?" he enquired, with his invariable politeness.

"Yes," she answered. "In reference to the photographs you take."

"You want me to take some photographs?"

Anne Grampette's simple directness was never displayed to better advantage.

"I want you not to take photographs. I want you to stop taking photographs in this neighbourhood."

"I — I — beg your pardon?" replied the startled Bamfield.

"We don't approve of them," said Miss Grampette. She did not explain who "we" were, but it was unnecessary. She herself was as important and her wishes as conclusive as quite a wide-embracing "we." "We look upon it as a quite unnecessary extravagance among the class of people you cater for."

Bamfield was still polite. "Excuse me," he returned, "if I don't quite grasp this. Do you really feel that it matters so much if people have their photographs taken?"

Miss Grampette had it all ready for him. "We consider the individual photograph to be an exhibition of childish vanity, and therefore immoral."

"Immoral! Oh, come, I say —" remonstrated Bamfield.

"Immoral," insisted Miss Grampette. "A combined group, perhaps" — this she conceded with a fine charity — "such as the Sunday-School Excursion, or the Mothers' Annual Outing, or the Men's Mutual Improvement Society. But we deprecate the encouragement of an undue sense of personal importance in the humbler walks of life."

Bamfield drew a deep breath. Anything quite like this he had not met before. His fine manners wilted a trifle.

"Apart from that," went on the lady, "Mr. Bapkin, our organist, and headmaster at the parish schools, is quite able to carry out any photographic work that is unavoidable in the neighbourhood."

Bamfield's politeness, though stricken grievously, still raised its head from the dust.

"It seems a very select neighbourhood," he ventured, with what he hoped was an ingratiating smile.

"There are a number of people, mostly ladies like myself, who have a proper sense of duty towards their humbler neighbours."

"How jolly," said Bamfield, "to live here always and be a humble neighbour! But — do you know how much I charge?"

"It is a matter of principle, not of cost," returned Miss Grampette loftily.

"But five shillings a dozen — think of it, my dear lady!" remonstrated Bamfield. "Come; you can't get much immorality for five shillings, you know." Miss Grampette's lips compressed further. "Let me show you." He ran over to the caravan and came back with the bundle of prints. "There, now!" He spread them out under Miss Grampette's nose. "I'll ask you, could photographs like these encourage anybody's sense of personal importance?"

"I don't feel called upon to express any opinion on the —" began his visitor, and then stopped abruptly as he dealt the prints over like a pack of cards. She pounced on one; her eyes opened. "What is this? My *niece?*"

Bamfield's most exquisite manner flashed to the forefront on the instant. A smile in which respectful admiration and gratification vied for expression in friendly contest suffused his ingenuous face.

"Oh, are you Miss Grampette?" He held his hand out. "How do you —"

The young man actually seemed to think that Miss Grampette was going to shake hands with him. She ignored his hand and eyed him stonily.

"It is as I feared." She again looked darkly at the print she held in her hand. "But after what I have said I don't think" — her lips curled in an

unpleasant smile — "I don't think that she is likely to be seen again in the vicinity of this caravan." To Bamfield's horror, as she said it she swung round and deliberately walked towards the standing offence.

Bamfield shuddered convulsively. While addressing Miss Grampette, he had caught a glimpse first of Rose's skirts, then of her face, peeping out from behind the caravan. Three strides of Miss Grampette would bring her lurking-place into full view. Two were taken — the third followed — almost an audible sigh of relief escaped from Bamfield. The figure of Rose came into view — under the caravan! Involved in imminent catastrophe, with barely a second's warning, she had instinctively taken the only possible course to save herself — she had dived between the wheels. Miss Grampette's third stride came uncompromisingly down on the turf as the tail-end of her niece's skirts whipped into their place of concealment. Bamfield breathed relief. So, one may judge, did Rose.

Miss Grampette, all unaware that she stood on the brink of a great discovery, paused to continue her remarks to Bamfield. "May I ask — I had better understand from you — are you likely to make a prolonged stay in this neighbourhood?"

No getting round her. Bamfield abandoned the attempt.

"It depends on what my horse says. She's de-

cided to lie up for a week or so. She's — she's rather a neurotic horse — has queer ideas about her near hind hoof —"

He stopped. Miss Grampette's level brows told him that she was in no mood for feeble jesting of this kind. She spoke acidly.

"While you stay in this neighbourhood, I shall look to see you make some improving use of your time. Improvement is our watchword in this parish. There are several admirable societies and leagues which will guide you on sound lines. Are you married?"

Bamfield started violently.

"No," he said, very loudly, and turned red — he did not know exactly why.

Miss Grampette eyed him keenly. Again Bamfield could not see why. He guessed it had something to do with his blush — and turned redder than ever.

"Dash it all!" he reflected. "This awful woman is making me feel nervous."

Miss Grampette continued: "Then you should take a special interest in an address on eugenics which will be given in the town hall to-morrow night, at seven-thirty."

"This is most kind," began Bamfield, "but —"

She cut him short. "Name?"

"Eh?"

"Name?" severely.

Bamfield was nervous. "Bam — er — Jones," he jerked out.

"Christian name?" She was taking it all down in a little notebook.

"George," Bamfield answered, then corrected himself: "No — James." He corrected himself again: "No — John."

Miss Grampette held her pencil stationary and surveyed him coldly.

"Christian name?" she repeated, in her iciest.

"John," Bamfield maintained. She accepted it this time.

"Permanent address?"

Bamfield was less docile. "What do you want my permanent address for?" he asked suspiciously.

"I propose to send you from time to time a selection of literature suitable to your age, sex, and class."

"I have n't got a permanent address," said Bamfield with decision.

She looked at him darkly. "No permanent address? How do I find you?"

Under the stress of this sort of thing even Bamfield was slowly stiffening.

"Nicely, thank you," he answered flippantly. "How's yourself?"

She snapped her notebook together and slipped a bit of elastic round it with a look expressive of her certainty that somewhere, somewhen, some-

how, he was to pay for that, and handed him a ticket.

"Here is a ticket." He had to take it. "No charge. Row B, Number 8. I am in the chair."

Bamfield's mild flippancy still persisted. "Really? That makes it so tempting. I've half a mind to be there."

Anne Grampette prepared to let loose her remaining flood upon him — a drowner.

"I should strongly advise you not to be anywhere else," she remarked in her most detached manner — detached, but ominous.

Bamfield took the challenge. "I say," he remarked admiringly, "you really ought to be chairman of the parish council!"

It came: "I am chairman of the parish council."

It secured every bit of the effect she expected. Bamfield's mouth opened weakly.

"Oh — er — ah —" was all he could offer.

She opened the floodgates a little wider. "There is no compulsion, but where pressure seems desirable in the interest of any particular individual, we do not hesitate to apply it."

Bamfield stood up to it. "Now we're coming to it! What happens, then, if I don't come?"

The first of the remaining double-handers swung home. "You have already raised the point that I am chairman of the parish council. I am, therefore, *ex officio*, a member of the highways and

byways committee, which is charged with the care of the common on which your caravan is now illegally trespassing."

"Tres — er — tres — But I — but you —"

The second followed, and all was over. "If I see you at the meeting, I may not feel called upon to urge any immediate action with regard to the indictable offence of which you have now been guilty for just upon a fortnight."

She waited to see if any power of offence or defence remained. No. The wreck was still on its feet, but obviously shattered beyond further feeling. With a majestic sweep of the eyelids that disdained him further notice, Miss Grampette walked away.

The caravan man rallied his forces and for the third time that morning set about his shave.

CHAPTER IX

ANNE GRAMPETTE'S visit and message had so impressed Bamfield that he actually forgot Rose. For the sake of that respect for the dignity of womanhood which is one of our civilization's safeguards, let us be glad of it. Her crawl from under the caravan was inevitably ungraceful. Rose herself was glad that Bamfield did not see her doing it. He jumped as he heard her voice almost in his ear, and stopped lathering again.

"You see," said Rose; "you'll have to go."

"I won't."

"But if they prosecute you —"

"Let 'em. I refuse to budge. Is this Ingerland, my Ingerland? Must n't a bloke live, lidy? Give me work or give me death! I shall go bankrupt soon. Here's this costly plant" — he waved his hand at the caravan — "standing idle, eating its head off. I'm going round Ouseton soon with a couple of sandwich-boards. 'Be good-natured — patronize art.' 'Order another half-dozen photographs. Give me some fresh sittings.'"

Rose laughed. "I say, you are a worker! You're sure to succeed, you know, sooner or later."

"I beg your pardon?" said Bamfield in shocked surprise. "I beg your pardon — 'sooner or later'?

Do you wish to suggest that I am not successful now? Do you come to throw my failure in my wretched teeth?"

Rose blushed. "Oh, I beg your pardon! That was very rude of me! But — I mean — just going about in a caravan, taking people's photographs at five shillings a dozen — Ought n't you to have got on further?"

"How?" demanded Bamfield.

"Well — I don't know, but — well, for instance, ought n't you to have a shop somewhere?"

"A shop? Why?"

"It would be a sort of home for you."

"I see. But don't you think this caravan is a good enough home for me?"

Rose hesitated. "Well, I thought — Most men, you know, would feel —"

"I know," broke in Bamfield. "You think that most men would feel ashamed of going about in this gipsy fashion, and would look forward with longing to a shop, with a name over it — just fancy, I have n't even got a name-board up on my caravan! — and plate-glass windows with gilt lettering, and lamps inside — perhaps" — he went on with lowered voice, as if awestruck by a glimpse of a new and great idea — "perhaps even lamps outside! Perhaps even a *man outside*, to invite people in as they passed!" He looked gloomily at his caravan. "Oh, why," he asked, with a touch of

passionate remonstrance in his voice, "why have you set me longing? I was so happy in my humble caravan, till you — yes, you — stole into my Eden and planted the seeds of discontent in my heart!"

Rose chilled. This was too flagrant.

"I think you are laughing at me," she said reproachfully. "I don't choose to be laughed at. Good-morning."

She was turning away, head high, when Bamfield's natural voice, eager and apologetic, detained her.

"Oh, but wait! I'm so sorry! I've something to show you. Do wait a minute." He picked up from the caravan steps the bundle of prints he had shown Miss Grampette and, sorting them out, selected two. "There!" He offered them for Rose's inspection.

Rose took them and looked pleased. "How splendid!"

"Do you think so?" said Bamfield. He took them from her and tore them in four.

Rose looked alarmed. "Whatever did you do that for?"

"They were n't good enough to please me — that's all," replied Bamfield. "I'm going to ask you to sit again."

"Oh, but I ought to tell you," said Rose, "I hardly see how I can. I ought not to be speaking to you. My aunt forbade it."

"Did she?" said Bamfield. "Well, I half guessed as much."

"I'm so sorry —" Rose hesitated.

"Oh, it's all right," said Bamfield, "She did n't hurt me. But, I say, why won't she let you speak to me?"

Rose felt embarrassed. "I don't quite know how to put it," she said, looking distressed. "She says, and so does my grandmother, that I ought not to be here at all. I — I have been rather a lot, have n't I?" she asked, frankly admitting her wrongdoing.

"Well, I don't see it." Bamfield thought of a plausible excuse for her, for him, for them both. "You wanted your photograph taken, and I undertook to do it, and I've had bad luck — that's all. It's meant a lot of sitting — a lot of trouble for you, of course —"

"Not at all," said Rose politely — and truthfully.

"So that you are n't in the least to blame."

"Well, but, apart from that —" she began, and stopped.

"Apart from that?"

"I hardly know how to say it. You see, I look upon you as quite — quite an intelligent man —"

"You are awfully good," said Bamfield gratefully.

"And I feel that in speaking to you I'm not

doing myself any harm, and — it — might do you some good."

"That," explained Bamfield, "that is what has been uppermost in my mind all the time — the good which I felt your conversation might do me. In fact, it has, already. I sometimes lie and wonder at the — the immense improvement that is taking place in me — imperceptible to outsiders, perhaps, but unmistakable to me. And if you'd only keep on — even your aunt will be sure to notice it in time. You have n't always lived with her, have you?" he asked, dexterously sweeping the conversation into the stream which he felt would float them both along.

"No," answered Rose. "Only the last seven years. Before that, we lived in London."

"We?"

"My father and I. I don't remember my mother. Father was n't very well off most of the time. Only when he sold a picture."

"Oh, was he an artist?"

"Yes. We lived together, just us two," went on Rose. She was floating along as the cunning Bamfield had intended, on the placid stream of general conversation, all thought of her aunt's interdict lost sight of. "We had an old studio somewhere near Primrose Hill in London, I've forgotten exactly where — a big barn of a place, with whitewashed walls and a roof like a church. One

day, I remember, when I was twelve years old, father drew me on the wall — painted me, just a quick sketch, with my hair all tumbling over my face and my eyes peeping through —" She had noticed Bamfield's look of astonishment and now stopped. He was staring at her queerly. "Why are you looking at me —"

He was indeed. The thing had come upon him with an unexpectedness that swept him off his feet. Day by day, with at times a feeling almost of uneasiness, he had felt the charm of this girl growing on him. At first she was just a piece of juvenile femininity of unusual grace and a face rare in shape, colour, poise, and — particularly noticeable — large grey eyes. Then the frankness, the innocence, the strange air of comradeship gradually allowed to exhibit itself as she grew used to talking to him had brought with it an immense satisfaction. In the evenings, smoking by his fire, his thoughts invariably turned to her, and he was used to survey himself with something of amused disdain at their wanderings.

And inevitably — he recognized it now — his thoughts had always linked Rose up in the queerest fashion with the picture on the wall at Primrose Hill. What a blockhead he had been! He had noticed a likeness, particularly when, at some extravagance in speech of his, her grey eyes had rested half puzzled, half amused, wholly fearless,

on his, yet till this moment no glimpse of the truth had opened to him.

"Studio at Primrose Hill!" murmured Bamfield more to himself than to Rose. "The face on the wall!"

"Yes," said Rose, "and father said he was sure that the next man that took the studio would want to know who the girl was, and would go searching for her. But nobody does," she concluded, pulling the corners of her mouth down in mock sadness.

Bamfield walked over to her. "Have you such a thing as a pin about you?" he asked. Rose, startled, produced one. "Would you mind," continued Bamfield, pulling up his coat-sleeve and the wrist of his shirt and displaying his bare forearm, "would you mind just sticking it in here? Ow!" as Rose did as requested. He pulled down his cuff and coat-sleeve again. "Thank you."

"Whatever is it?" asked the puzzled Rose.

"Nothing at all — really nothing. I find I'm wide awake." He laughed. "Go on. Tell me some more."

"Soon after that," said Rose sadly, "my father died."

Bamfield looked his sympathy. "Then you came here?"

"Yes. Sometimes I wish I'd been a year or two older and able to get a living for myself, as some

girls do. You know, my aunt does n't like me. Sometimes I wish I could go and find the old studio at Primrose Hill again, and knock at the door, and when the nice old man that lives there —"

"Old?" interjected Bamfield hastily, as if remonstrating. "I say, why old?"

"Oh, yes — old, nice, and white-haired," decided Rose, "like my father. I should n't like a young man to have it, somehow — our old studio."

"Sorry," murmured Bamfield. For a second something further hovered on his lips, but he checked it, and Rose continued: —

"Then perhaps he'd let me live there, and I'd cook for him — I can cook — and I'd dust and sweep and keep everything nice and tidy, and if he got worried, I'd sit and talk to him and make him laugh, as I used to do to father. I say, you do stare!"

"Do I?" Bamfield was thinking deeply.

Rose was sitting on one of the great limbs of the tree's roots. Bamfield brought over his stand camera. The girl was in a day-dream, her thoughts away in the whitewashed studio at Primrose Hill. Bamfield was chuckling to himself. "Dashed funny!" he said to himself, but his heart was beating fast. He got the camera into position and focused her in the screen, pulling the velvet cloth over his head in the regulation fashion. Rose hardly noticed him.

"I say, turn sideways, will you?" said Bamfield suddenly.

She started. "I don't think I ought to — really, you can't possibly afford to take all these photos for five shillings, and I can't afford any more. Besides — besides" — she stood up, her voice full of regrets — "I ought not to be here. They told me not to come. I must go. Send on my prints when they're done, will you?"

Bamfield came out from under the cloth. He was n't going to have this — not in this way, at any rate.

"I say," he said, speaking seriously, "are n't you really going to speak to me any more?"

Rose was as serious as he. "I must n't," she said, unsmiling.

They were both desperately grave.

"It's a shame!" — Bamfield thought hard; then: "Look here! Wait a minute. I passed the Priory this morning between four and five o'clock, and, do you know, there's a part of that big stone barn quite near the house —"

"I know," said Rose. "There's a part that's very old."

"Yes," said Bamfield. "Early Norman, I'm sure. I mean it. You find things like that sometimes — real old stuff still standing as part of a quite modern building. And I believe there's more to be found about the Priory if we looked about.

Well, now, would n't your aunt like to have some photographs made of the place by a man who knows a lot about Norman architecture?"

Rose sparkled. "Do you?"

"I do." Rose was agleam, Bamfield alert and smiling. Schemes formed in his brain. "I tell you what — I'll come over this afternoon, and bring my camera and take photos. You'll come and watch me, won't you?"

"If I can — if they'll let me." Rose was delighted.

"What time do you finish lunch?"

"About two o'clock."

"I'll be over directly afterwards. And I'm going to get on your aunt's right side. Ask me to tea."

Rose's face fell from eager anticipation to distress.

"I'm afraid —"

"What? Must n't you?"

She flushed. "I'm afraid," she explained unwillingly, "they might ask you to tea — in the kitchen."

Bamfield laughed. "Oho! Never mind. You leave that to me. I tell you what" — a new idea danced through him — "Will you come and have tea with me here — say to-morrow afternoon?"

Rose's teeth flashed in a smile as she replied: "I'd love to, but I dare n't. And, anyhow, we have some people coming to tea to-morrow afternoon."

Bamfield's idea had now taken possession of him. He varied it at once to suit the difficulty.

"Then come to supper to-night! There, now — I dare you! I'll have supper by eight o'clock, if you dare to slip away. I'll have my fire going, and I'll cook you the dinkiest supper out here in the open —"

The wild-woman-of-the-woods that lurks in every true female breast roused to life in Rose at the thought.

"Oh," she breathed, "if I dared!"

"Dare!" Bamfield adjured her, in just that tone of challenge and urge that from the right man to the right woman is irresistible. "Dare! You're not afraid of me — are you?"

"Not a bit," she said frankly. "I think you're quite — quite nice."

"You've splendid taste," Bamfield announced, heartily commendatory. "Make up your mind. Say you'll come."

Rose hesitated, thrilling. The wild-woman-of-the-woods tore at her. She must come — oh, she must!

"Could I be home by nine?" was her last difficulty.

"Absolutely without fail." Bamfield's confidence closed on her, binding her down to an irrevocable step. "That's settled, then."

"No, no," she objected, frightened at his un-

principled rushing of any last defences she might have had.

"Right!" he returned, with brass-fronted assurance. "That's a promise. I'll just shave, and then cycle into the village and get some more plates for my camera. And when I come, you must come and help me. You know how a camera works, don't you?"

"No, I don't," said Rose. "I know you take a cap off, and I know you get under a cloth and walk the thing about on its legs, but what for I've never understood."

"You must learn," said Bamfield. "Then you really could help me. I mean without any humbug. Have n't you ever looked into the focusing glass?"

"Never."

"Then have a look now. Come on."

Over to him she stepped. Bamfield uncapped the lens, put in the focusing glass, held up the black cloth. Rose stooped down; he popped its fold over her — and over himself. There they were, close together, their heads and shoulders in close contact under the cloth. Bamfield altered the point of view. To do so, he had to pass his arm round Rose's waist to grasp the spidery legs of the camera. Rose blushed in the darkness.

"Now," said Bamfield, "can you see?"

"It's very queer," she answered.

"No, it's all right. It's the pond and the common."

She was puzzled. "I can't make it out — Oh, I see! Everything's upside down!"

Bamfield laughed. "Of course — did n't you know that? Everything's wrong way up when you see it through the lens."

"Well, how was I to know that?"

"Of course. I ought to have told you. Can you see it now?"

She squirmed a little sideways to try and get a more naturalistic view of the brilliant image, sparkling and shifting in the ground-glass screen. Bamfield again moved the camera around — that is to say, he again placed his arm around Rose's waist to reach the camera legs. He kept it there, moving the camera around from point to point, delighting her with the panorama of pictures sweeping across the screen as the camera turned . . .

"Good Heavens! It's Rose! Rose!"

Rose and Bamfield came out from under the cloth as if a chastising hand from the clouds had descended upon them. Rose's hat was pushed rakishly aside; Bamfield's hair, never very tidy, was swept in a dissipated heap across his eyes; both were startled. Rose, telling herself furiously that she was innocent, felt that she looked guilty. Of what, in Heaven's name? Nothing — and yet —

Two paces away stood two ladies — one, Aunt Anne; the other — Bamfield saw in a flash that this must be "Granny."

She was Rose's height; she was eighty at least; she was skinny, tough, energetic, brown-eyed, and a most imposing figure. In her dress she was a joy to Bamfield. She was clothed in the style affected by ladies round about the year 1860. On her head was a dark-green coal-scuttle bonnet, round her shoulders an admirable Paisley shawl; her ample gown was extended from her wiry and agile figure by a large crinoline; she wore white stockings — displayed well above the ankle — and spring-sided boots, and the slightly frilled ends of a pair of long white linen trousers glinted coyly at the beholder. She carried a fat green umbrella, holding it in just the manner you would expect — that is, with its ferrule concealed by her hands, folded over one another at the region of her waist, while its head sloped upward across her left upper arm.

Rose spoke: "Granny, this is Mr. Jones. He is taking my photograph."

The old lady looked grimly at Bamfield. "Taking your photograph! Was that what he was doing when I saw you just now?"

"Saw me just now, Granny? When?"

"When I came here this very second and found you endeavouring to conceal yourself under that cloak or whatever it is, with this man's arm round your waist?"

Rose blushed. Bamfield endeavoured to draw the lightning to himself. He raised his hat — no,

he had forgotten — he was n't wearing one, but he raised his hair from his forehead and assumed what he hoped might pass for a photographer's professional manner.

"I was explaining the working of a lens," he said. "The working of a lens is a rather technical matter very few people really understand. If you think it would be of any interest to you —" he went on diffidently. He held up the fringe of his black cloth invitingly.

Granny stiffened, but gave him no reply beyond a withering glance. Rose stood with clasped hands innocent, but awkward. The faint and formless questionings of the past week had not yet borne fruit. Rose, with the heart of a lioness within her, was still a timid thing in the presence of her aunt and her grandmother.

Bamfield had a shot at Aunt Anne. "I'm so glad to see you again," he ventured, with what he hoped was a successful attempt to look delighted. "I wanted to say you were quite right about that promiscuous photography."

"Indeed?" from Aunt Anne.

"And as regards to-morrow night," went on Bamfield, "I should n't think of missing the lecture. It will be awfully" — awfully what, he wondered? — "jolly, I've no doubt."

Jolliness, even in perspective, evidently did not appeal to the chairman of the parish council.

"Indeed?" was again all she vouchsafed.

Even now Bamfield did not give in. "I had been wondering," he tried, "if I might take a few photographs at the Priory. I have noticed —"

"Certainly not," said Aunt Anne.

Bamfield went on rapidly: "I had noticed several distinctly interesting bits of architecture about the place — Early Norman, some of it — and I was hoping —"

"No," said Aunt Anne.

" — Was hoping that I might get permission to make a negative —"

"I have already told you our feeling with regard to your photography."

A slight perspiration made its appearance on Bamfield's brow. The day was hot — and his task was a hard one.

"I hope you won't think me too persistent, but it's rather a hobby of mine — Early Norman architecture —"

"We prefer to preserve the Priory from intrusion."

"Of course — quite so. The charm of these old houses is their privacy."

"Distinctly," said Aunt Anne; and even Bamfield's persistence paused to draw breath. She waited with malicious pleasure to slash off its head when it next ventured to raise itself from the dust. Rose stood writhing at her rudeness. Granny, all

this time — But no. Granny's occupation must be disclosed later.

Bamfield turned up his last card, or, rather, he endeavoured to do so.

"Forgive me — it's purely a personal matter, but I'm not — excuse my dragging it in — but — this photography, you know — it's not really — In a way I'm — I'm sailing under false colours —"

Aunt Anne swept his card off the table without deigning to look at it.

"I am not surprised — and I am not interested, either. And in any case, we decline to admit you to the Priory."

He gave it up. Only for the present, he told himself, but this odious woman was too terrible for words. She should not defeat him finally — that he swore; but for the moment he confessed she had him beaten. He drew a long breath and looked at Rose. Anne turned away triumphant. Granny took Rose's hand in hers, Anne ranged up on her other side, Rose threw Bamfield a glance of shame and apology, and the three women moved away.

For an instant the primitive being that lurked in Bamfield's mental background urged him savagely to rush forward, seize Rose, wrench her away, lift her into his caravan, and drive the others away with spear or club. But in that same instant came something else that robbed the moment of

every tinge of bitterness. Quite simply it signalled to him, "All this is nothing, this 'good-bye' to her. Ask yourself, is it possible? Does n't every instinct in you tell you with infallible certainty that you and she cannot possibly part like this? Don't you know, are n't you certain in yourself, that you two will meet and talk again?" And with a great inward laugh of pleasure, he gave himself the confident answer, "Yes."

She was gone. He backed, still looking after her, towards the caravan steps, where his shaving-mug, brush, and razor were waiting to fulfil their purpose of the day. His shaving-water was cold. He decided to use it as it was, and in a few seconds had covered his chin with the cold lather. He perched his fragment of looking-glass on the steps, opened his razor —

At that moment a bicycle rounded the caravan, pulled up short, and Bertha Babbage jumped off and offered him a telegram, with the remark, "Bamfield, Caravan, Ouseton-under-Mere — Is that right?"

Bamfield took the telegram, opened the envelope, took out the form inside, ignored it, and stared at Bertha Babbage.

Bertha Babbage was tall, broad-shouldered, broad-hipped, long-armed, long-legged, handsome, fearless as an Amazon. She was the assistant postmistress at Ouseton; she earned thirty shillings a

week and kept herself on it. Perhaps that was why it took an eye like Bamfield's to comprehend all her excellence. It is true that she had grace without slenderness, strength without coarseness, bulk with long lines that spoke of the utmost harmony of structure, the bosom of a goddess. But a skirt none too well-cut, a ready-made blouse, a hat nearing the end of possible service even for business purposes, shoes bought for economy — these gave a suggestion of clumsiness that undiscerning minds accepted. Yet her poise was firmness itself, the carriage of her head on her great neck imperial. Her mass of fair hair was first plaited, then wound round the crown of her head in fashion half Greek, half Scandinavian.

A shop-girl, most of her waking existence bounded by the shop's horizon, she had acquired that easy and casual confidence necessary to a woman so situated. For any girl shop-life means dirty weather, and therefore she assumes a bold and challenging frankness, for the same reason that her more happily situated sister puts on at times a mackintosh and a rainy-day skirt. It's the sensible wear.

It was the artist, not the man, that stared at her beyond the limits of good manners. Bertha never turned a hair. She was used to such small rudenesses.

"Any answer?" she queried.

Bamfield jerked himself back. He wiped the lather from his face.

"I beg your pardon," he said with sincerity, and read the wire. It ran:—

Just found out where you are. May I come and talk business? — Iffelstein.

"Got a form?" asked Bamfield. Bertha produced a blank telegraph form. "Thanks," said Bamfield. He found a pencil, wrote a reply, and handed it to Bertha. "How much?" he asked.

Bertha took the form, read it over, smiled, and shook her head.

"This won't do," she said. "We could n't send this."

"What's wrong?" asked Bamfield.

"Well, this. You'll have to put something else."

"What may I put?"

"I don't know. Put, 'No, thank you,' not, 'No, damn you.'"

"All right."

He took the form back and made the necessary alteration. This Bertha accepted, together with the amount of the charge, put the telegram in her pocket, wheeled her bicycle a yard or so, hesitated, looked at Bamfield consideringly. Then, "I say—" she began, and stopped.

"Yes?" enquired Bamfield.

"I suppose that telegram was all right? I mean, I thought your name was Jones."

"Trade name," Bamfield explained.

Bertha still forbore to mount and ride. Bamfield looked her over admiringly. She caught his eye and smiled good-humouredly. Bamfield wanted to talk to her.

"Are you a sample of the telegraph-boys about here?" he ventured.

Bertha accepted the chaff and the implied compliment quite pleasantly.

"We have only one at Ouseton, and he was out, so I offered to run up with your telegram. As a matter of fact, I particularly wanted to speak to you."

"Yes?" Bamfield was all attention.

"You take photos, don't you?" Bertha went on. "Would you take a rather special one of me?"

"Perhaps I could. What's the 'special'?"

"You don't mind my telling you? I want a very nice one — in evening dress."

"And fine you'd look, my lady," thought Bamfield. Aloud he said, in proper businesslike manner, "All right. Where?"

"That's it," said Bertha. "Could you do it up here?"

"I dare say. But — won't you look rather queer coming up here in evening dress?"

"Could n't I come after dark?"

"I don't quite see how I can photo you after dark," Bamfield told her.

"ARE YOU A SAMPLE OF THE TELEGRAPH-BOYS ABOUT HERE?"

She grew downcast, looked at Bamfield again as if considering. He felt that there was something more in the girl's request than appeared on the surface.

"What is it?" he asked. "I don't want to be curious, you know, but if you cared to tell me a little more, perhaps I might be able to help."

"Well, I will tell you," said Bertha, wheeling her machine a little closer and dropping her voice as she made her modest confidences. "You see, I'm engaged — or as good as. I don't know why — I don't really even like him. He's an architect here, and he's been very nice, I must say, and — somehow — you know how it happens —"

"I know," said Bamfield encouragingly.

"Well, somehow, the more I thought of it, the more I did n't like it, and at last I made up my mind I ought to tell him. I meant to write and say I wanted to give him up — when I'm bothered if he did n't write the very same thing to me!"

She was fair enough. It was the humour of the thing that struck her, and when Bamfield laughed, she laughed too, a hearty "Ha! ha! ha!"

"But it was a take-down for me, was n't it?" she went on. "Of course I found out all about it. He's been running up to London a good deal, and he's got to know a girl — an actress, he calls her, some chorus-girl, I should think. She's sent him her photo — I know all about it from his sister —

and you can guess what she's like. It's taken in tights."

"Oho!" said Bamfield portentously.

Bertha laughed again. "Well, I won't bemean myself, but I've seen the photograph and — Well, I don't want to brag, but thinks I, 'My boy, if you only knew!'"

She looked primly at Bamfield. He roared.

"And he does n't?" Bertha's glance reproved him. "I beg your pardon, but I thought you said you were engaged."

"Well, you see how it is. I don't want him — only, I do really want to make him feel sick and sorry. Of course," she went on, with a divine blush, "I would n't — I could n't — But, thinks I, 'You *can* let him see your photo in evening dress, and — well, perhaps that will make him open his eyes a bit.'"

Her frankness was irresistible. Bamfield smothered as best he could the laugh that was shaking him inwardly.

"I'll help you," he said decidedly. "Got the dress?"

"No," said Bertha, "but some one I know — a lady's-maid down here — can get me one of her mistress's very best. Lady Badderley-Boulger wears the most tremendous evening frocks, and she's got a new one that's a dream. I know, because I've tried it on already on the sly, and it

suits me — really, you would think it was made for me. I can get it this evening, but I can't get away till half-past eight. Now, if I came up here with it on — she can lend me a cloak as well — say by nine —"

"Nine!" Bamfield stopped her. "My dear girl, I can't photograph by moonlight."

Bertha's expressive face showed the keenness of her disappointment. "Can't you? Are you sure? I hoped perhaps you could." She looked at him pleadingly. "I wish you could." Another look. "Have n't you got a light that would do?"

"No."

Bertha sighed. Bamfield took thought, considering her all the while. Her pose was irresistible — regret, hope, and appeal all conveyed in the droop of the head and the upward glance of the eye.

"Look here — you're sure you can't get here in daylight?"

"Certain."

"Then I'll try and make a flashlight of you." She sparkled. "You come up — When did you say? Nine? No, that won't do. I'm engaged till nine, and possibly a little later, this evening; say half-past nine. Any one coming with you?"

"I don't suppose so."

"Does n't matter. Come up, ready dressed, and I'll get hold of some flash powder and make some pictures of you. Come at half-past nine."

Bertha was all smiles. "You are good! How much will they be?"

"We'll see. Now, are you sure you're coming?"

"Rather!" There was n't a doubt about it. Miss Bertha Babbage had no intention of wasting her chance. She put one foot on the pedal and prepared to mount. "I say," she paused to add, "promise me not to tell any one about me. People talk in the country."

"Not a soul shall know," Bamfield assured her. She was in the saddle and slowly pedalling away, glancing at him with the greatest friendliness and gratitude. "We'll make that fugitive youth of yours want to kick himself," called Bamfield.

She laughed delightedly. "Was n't it cheek of him?" over her shoulder. "Thanks awfully."

"Right-o!" Bamfield waved his hand.

Bertha stopped. The caravan man, as if seized with a sudden insanity, was leaping for the pond. Horror! Suicide! Bertha fell off her bicycle, picked herself up, rubbed her knee, ran to the bank — It was all right; there he was, rod in hand and almost dancing with excitement.

"You there!" he shouted. "Give me a hand! I've got him!"

"Got who?" she panted.

"Muddy Jerusalem, or whatever he's called. I

say, run up into my caravan, will you? — look about; you'll see a landing-net. Bring it here and help. Run! —"

She ran, flew up the steps, caught up the net which she saw at first glance, dashed back with long strides.

"Come down here," shouted the caravan man, "and do what I tell you! Don't fall in, and keep cool."

"One of us had better keep cool," reflected Bertha — but wisely kept the thought to herself.

"Now, then, just lower the net below the surface — steady! — You won't snatch, will you?"

"Won't snatch what?"

"My fish. I've got him! I said I would. Oho, my beauty! I'll just let him feel the strain — sulky, are you? Aha! — I'll work him over to you . . . See him?"

Bertha peered into the depths among the reeds. "I can see *something*."

"I'll bring him up to the top; you get the net under him and lift him, deftly and surely . . . Wait . . . Now, Senile Solomon . . . Up!"

"Up" it was. Bertha saw something rising to the surface, swept the net under, lifted, swung it onto the bank . . .

"Hah!" she croaked. "Haha! hahaha! hahahaha!"

"Haha!" said Bamfield savagely. "Laugh, you

— you — !" His native politeness saved him from a bad break.

Bertha dropped the net-handle, and with tears of laughter blinding her began to grope for the handles of her bicycle.

Bamfield slowly began to disentangle the net from his dripping carpet-sweeper . . .

He succeeded, held it up, began to tilt the water from it. His eye lit on Bertha. She felt it was as much as her life was worth to laugh again. She began to wheel her bicycle away. "Look out where you're coming!" said a voice sharply. Through wet eyes she glimpsed a figure in grey, holding a large bouquet of assorted flowers. It was female, coy, yet with something of that air of independence and self-confidence that dawns so swiftly in the average woman after the wedding ceremony has lifted her to the high estate of wife. By her side was a figure in black, wearing a large chimney-pot hat draped with crape . . .

Mr. and Mrs. Gubbins halted to look at Bamfield. He had now fairly drained the carpet-sweeper, and his usual air of careless confidence was restored.

He addressed the happy pair. "Done it?" he enquired.

Mr. Gubbins grinned. "Yus," he answered.

With great decision the caravan man stepped forward, and embracing the startled Dorothy,

imprinted a resounding kiss, a proper country kiss, on her rosy cheek. The indignant husband made a move — into his arms Bamfield pressed the wet carpet-sweeper. Mr. Gubbins grasped it — Bamfield again kissed Dorothy. Then, releasing her, "Bless you, my children," he said, and turned to assist the almost helpless Bertha to mount.

CHAPTER X

LUNCH at the Priory was over. It had been an affair of suppressed thunder. Why suppressed neither Aunt Anne nor Granny could have said. Both had intended to discharge their lightnings fully and completely at the culprit, as was their wont, but — but — somehow a new and strange feeling had come over them both, corresponding, had they known it, to a new and strange feeling that now possessed Rose. Rose was half frightened at herself. Somewhere within her depths a terrible thing had raised its sinister head, a thing the very existence of which she had never suspected.

"You're not a child," it whispered. "You're a woman."

It was terrible, unnerving. It could n't be true. Aunt Anne and Granny were women, and see how much older they were.

"Nonsense!" said the voice. "You're a woman. Tell them so."

No, that she dared not do, but she almost trembled as she stood at her glass before she ran down to the dining-room and tried to decide if there was truth or falsehood in this insidious counsel. She came to no decision, but the very fact that she

had come to that questioning made a subtle change in her that was sensed by the two others. She spoke scarcely a word, and yet there was something different about her. Aunt Anne looked fixedly at her, undecided as to speaking. Rose, looking up, caught her aunt's eye — and looked steadily at her in return till Aunt Anne looked away and at Granny. Granny looked at Aunt Anne, and the meal went on in silence.

After lunch Rose went into the garden and wandered there, thinking. What had she done wrong? Why had she been brought home like a child? Why must she not speak to the caravan man? Not that it mattered, but to be ordered, directed, not to do so mattered very much indeed.

This Jones — Mr. Jones, the photographer — was quite a well-behaved man. Any one could see that. Never offensive, quite humorous at times, and intelligent and — well, really, superior. You felt surprised when you talked to him at finding he took people's photographs. And while he talked about — What did he talk about? Nothing in particular, but you somehow discovered that he had queer views on — on — what? Everything, she supposed.

He was different from other men — his dress, his mode of life. Of course, the very caravan marked him out as different. He wandered about in it, refusing to be tied to one spot like people who

lived in houses. He had to go shopping. She had met him once or twice with pockets bulging with little odd packages, on his way up from Ouseton. And he did things for himself, and lit fires on the common at night, going to bed, so she heard, tremendously late and sometimes apparently getting up almost immediately afterward. She smiled. She liked the thought of Mr. Jones. And just then Mr. Jones's head popped up over the hedge that parted the garden from the common. His eyes twinkled.

"Miss Rose," he said.

Rose's heart gave a great jump — of surprise at first, and then, she knew, of pleasure.

"You must n't," she said.

"It's all right. I shan't be a minute. I must speak to you. It's tremendously important. Do come here."

She glanced at the house, saw Granny and Aunt Anne, through the French windows that gave onto the lawn, sitting inside the drawing-room, and then walked to the hedge. She could not be seen from the house there.

Bamfield was standing on the top of the low bank on which the holly hedge was planted.

"I say," he began, "you won't mind, but — you know when your grandmother took — when your grandmother and you went away this morning?"

"Yes?"

"Well — you won't mind? — she took my lens."

A furious flood of crimson dyed Rose's cheeks.

"Your lens?" she repeated.

"Yes," said Bamfield apologetically. "You know — off my camera."

"Are you sure?" asked Rose. Her heart sank. She knew it was so.

"Yes," answered Bamfield. "Don't look like that," he went on. "You make me feel such a cad to say anything about it, but, you see, I can't take photographs without it, and then it gives me an idea, too."

Poor Rose divulged the secret of the Priory. Not that it was a secret, but it had been secret from Bamfield till now.

"I'm so sorry," she stammered. "You know — of course she does n't mean any harm — but — but — she is like that — at times — over some things."

Bamfield tried to put her at her ease. "I know," he struck in. "Lots of old ladies do queer little things. So do old gentlemen. Look at me, and all the queer little ways I've got. It's only old age creeping on."

"You're not old," said Rose.

"I am. I shall never see thirty again." He sighed. "Well, now, about my lens — I ought to have it —"

"Of course," she answered. "I'll get it for you."

"No, no!" he cried in alarm. "Don't do that! Good gracious! you'll spoil it all! Leave the lens where it is."

"Then what will you do?"

"I'm going to call and ask for it."

Rose saw it in a flash. Of course that was the scheme. He was going to call boldly at the Priory and ask for his lens. He had a perfect right to. He could not be denied — he could not very well be treated rudely, even. Granny's queer little ways were one of the everyday trifles of Ouseton existence, so well known that no one even thought of commenting on them, but here was a stranger, a man, moreover, who had been snubbed — "abominably treated" — said Rose to herself, and he was entitled to look at the matter from a very different standpoint. His means of livelihood had been appropriated — that phrase might well proceed from the stern lips of a prosecuting counsel in a magistrate's court! He was a deeply injured man, entitled to be hard and unforgiving, to waive explanations and excuses to one side, to refuse to be placated. Rose saw at once that he would have to be appeased. She saw Aunt Anne attempting it. She saw Granny, stiff, stubborn, and unrepentant, standing on her dignity. She saw — yes, she saw quite plainly that in all probability she, Rose, would be deputed to put matters straight.

"When are you coming?" She was all smiles.

"You've finished lunch, have n't you?"

"Yes."

"Then, I'm coming now."

"Am I to let Aunt Anne know?"

"No, don't let any one know anything. I'm just going to stroll in directly, and — well, you'll see."

"Give me a minute, then. I must be there. And, oh!" she pleaded, "you won't be unkind, will you? But there! I know you won't." She was quite sure.

"Unkind — I should think not! But it's just a lovely chance, is n't it? All right. Good-bye. I'll be there in a minute or two."

He dropped down from the bank, and Rose, with beating heart, made her way back to the house.

Always after lunch Granny and Aunt Anne had a cup of tea, Rose pouring out for them. The little table was there on the lawn by the drawing-room window, in the shade of the tall rhododendron bushes, and Aunt Anne and Granny, with sewing in their hands, were coming out of the drawing-room. Rose sat down and poured them each a cup. She usually went away directly afterwards, but to-day she poured a cup for herself — a third cup was always set — and drank at leisure, keeping a calm face — and listening hard.

There came a step on the gravel drive. From where they sat they could hear, but not see, the approach to the front door of any caller.

"Somebody calling!" exclaimed Aunt Anne. "Whoever can it be?"

Round the rhododendron bushes appeared a white-capped maid, and close behind her — the caravan man. With sublime bad manners, he had followed her as she went to enquire whether Granny would receive him, and now here he was, his big camera under his arm, a bag over his shoulder with darkslides in it, the legs folded up into a neat bundle in his left hand, his hat raised in his right.

"Please, mum," began the maid, "a gentleman — Oh, here he is!"

Aunt Anne stood up. So did Rose. Granny sat still. Rose glanced at her. Her eyes wore that far-away look of pensive saintliness that always indicated her sense of the approach of another discovery.

Aunt Anne stepped with easy confidence to the top of her iceberg and sent a frosty blast onto Bamfield.

"Not at home," she said to the maid, clearly and loudly.

Bamfield bowed. "Oh, pardon me, I did n't come to make a call. I hope you will forgive me — but I've called about my lens."

Like a flash Aunt Anne guessed — and grew faint. She glanced at Granny, and her guess froze to certainty. Yet the instinct of parley moved her.

"Your lens?" she said, in her most detached manner. "Lens — I don't quite —"

"It's quite all right." Bamfield was cheerful, but determined. He had got his foot in at the Priory and did not mean to be dismissed easily. He turned to Granny. "I am glad you felt interested," he observed, in the friendliest way, "but it's useless without the camera, so I brought that with me."

He looked around as if seeking where to deposit his impedimenta. Rose, with a boldness that staggered her, took the camera legs from him and placed them on the table. He put the camera there, also, and turned to Aunt Anne.

"I asked Mrs. Grampette this morning if she would care to examine the working of a lens," he went on, still in his politest style, "and she could not spare the time then, evidently. I suppose you meant to find time this afternoon?" He turned enquiringly to Granny. "But, as I say, the lens by itself is useless, so I brought the camera round, and — if you'll let me have the lens back —"

Granny looked at Aunt Anne — Aunt Anne looked at Granny. Neither spoke. The intruder held all the cards. The very ease of his manner, though it spared the feelings of both — even Aunt Anne felt almost a touch of gratitude — seemed to leave him still more certainly in possession of

the field. Again Rose, hitherto accustomed to speak when she was spoken to, displayed a new initiative: —

"Thank you, Mr. Jones," she said. "It's very kind of you, and Granny will be delighted. I'll get the lens. Granny, it's in your bag, is n't it? — in your room?"

"Yes," said Granny.

The old lady was really feeling very bad. These discoveries took place from time to time, but always among people who knew her — the servants, Rose or Anne, the tradespeople at Ouseton. But to be exposed like this by this stranger — it was terrible! Still, she admitted, the man was behaving in quite a gentlemanly way.

Rose went into the house. Aunt Anne made a movement to follow her, but stopped. An awkward silence of a few seconds followed. Then Bamfield said: —

"What a perfect day!"

"Delightful," said Aunt Anne.

If he had said, "What filthy weather!" and she had replied, "Horrid!" the expression on her face would have been much the same.

"Won't you sit down?" said Granny, and Bamfield sat down in Rose's chair.

He felt a little thrill at the thought, and a great sense of accomplishment. An hour ago he had been an accursed outsider, and now here he was,

the serpent, boldly ensconced in Eden, not wriggling in, but — but — stalking in, as one might be forgiven for putting it, under the upturned noses and flaming swords of the very angels at the gate.

Rose appeared, carrying in her hand Granny's bag, an affair of cloth drawn together at the mouth with a string. She handed it to Granny.

"I have n't opened it," she said.

Granny took the bag without a word, slipped her hand in, and drew out the lens, a thing of brass and glass, not much bigger than a walnut.

"Is this it?" she asked.

Bamfield took it with easy unconcern. "Yes, that's it — a Zeiss," he remarked. "A capital make of lens. I'll put it on the camera, and then you can have a good look."

Rose spoke. She was staggered at her own audacity, but the look of affairs as she had rejoined the group had nerved her. Bamfield was so at home. He was leaning back composedly in the garden chair, his hat on the grass, his camera by his side, the bag with the darkslides at his feet, the camera legs on the table; and he was looking at Aunt Anne and Granny with so companionable an air that Rose almost laughed outright. She suppressed that, but her second impulse she adopted.

"Have a cup of tea, first," she said.

Aunt Anne jumped. Granny turned to stare. Rose never flinched.

Bamfield jumped up. "Thanks. If you will —"

"Sit down," said Rose. "I'm not going to sit. And I want a fresh cup. You've lunched, I suppose?"

How she did it she scarcely knew, but the words were out — and Aunt Anne could stare as much as she liked.

"Oh, thanks very much, yes." Bamfield sat down again as he was bidden.

Rose went into the drawing-room and rang the bell. The maid appeared.

"Another cup and saucer," said Rose, and a minute later was standing at the table pouring tea for Bamfield. She had a feeling that she could not carry the thing through much longer. She felt like one attempting to skate for the first time and miraculously succeeding straight away — that it was delicious, but bound to end in catastrophe very soon. But Bamfield's immense ease was a tremendous asset. He sipped his tea and talked to Granny.

He completely ignored all that had passed between them that morning. He calmly assumed the attitude of a friend, dropped in casually. No, not quite that; somehow he had contrived to invest his visit with the air of an arranged thing, a matter of invitation and acceptance. Not one word of his

touched on the subject, yet it was plain that his stay was to be of some hours' duration. Objection was impossible. Granny had stolen his lens, and if this was the price of forgiveness, they might well be thankful. Rose, of course, was misbehaving. How dared she! Offering the man tea! But there! Perhaps, under the circumstances, it was all for the best. Anyhow, it was plain that he had no intention of making a fuss, and if a little civility would finally put matters right — why, Rose perhaps was doing the right thing.

"I almost wonder," Bamfield was saying, "I almost wonder you have n't taken to photography. It's immensely absorbing — and so easy." Granny looked uninterested. "Not the way I do it, of course, the professional way — though that's interesting, too. Let me show you." He got up, screwed the lens into its holder on the front of his camera, racked out the bellows, brought it round to Granny's side, and put it on the table near her. "If you'll look —" He whipped his black cloth out of the pocket of his jacket, slipped it over his head, and focused part of the garden. "There! Look," he said; "it's quite interesting."

Granny had to look. She did not want to, but this photographer man was a person still to be conciliated. She dipped her old head under the black cloth. After a second or two, "It's upside down," she objected.

"Yes, it is, and that can't be helped, but—"

"But are your photographs all taken upside down?"

She came hastily out from under the cloth. A thought had flashed through her. Rose had been photographed— Had she been taken upside down?

Bamfield reassured her, explaining the difference between a negative and a print. Granny did not quite grasp it, but as Bamfield talked, he twisted the camera about, focusing on different parts of the lawn, and Granny began to feel interested at the moving pictures in the ground-glass screen.

"It's pretty," she declared, "and so like."

"Yes," said Bamfield, "wonderfully like, is n't it? Now let's look at somebody."

He pointed the camera at Aunt Anne, who sat grimly enduring, but secretly resentful.

"Ha, ha!" said Granny. "There she is! You're here, Anne, upside down."

Anne smoothed her frock down.

Then Rose must be looked at. She stood still, confident, while Bamfield got her into focus.

"Oh, is n't that pretty?" exclaimed Granny.

"Rather!" said Bamfield heartily.

Rose moved away.

"I'd like to have a picture like that," said Granny.

"Well, shall I take one?" said Bamfield.

"Could you?" asked Granny, surprised.

"Of course. If you would n't mind standing there again, Miss Rose."

Rose stood, and Granny watched with interest while Bamfield took her photograph. Then Rose protested that Granny must have hers taken. Granny accepted the suggestion, but Rose insisted on taking her up to her room first to make her fine. Insensibly there was stealing over the little party a friendliness, a sense of comradeship, that Bamfield had the knack of creating. Only Aunt Anne withstood it. Grimly enduring this man's objectionable presence, she declined to be thawed. Protest she could scarcely voice — discretion forbade; but she had to shut her lips tightly to check the speech she would have given much to make. Rose should hear something by and by as to her conduct. And as for Granny — well!

Bamfield, who had done his best with her, rested contented in his partial defeat. He had made headway with the old lady at least — and here he was, in the garden, strolling round the lawn, hands in pockets, smoking.

"Why don't you smoke, Mr. Jones?" Rose had called out as she had led her grandmother away, and he had lit a cigarette.

Granny was photographed. Aunt Anne declined.

"What about the barn?" said Rose, in the most casual manner. "If you'd like to make some pictures there —"

"I should," replied Bamfield earnestly.

"Will you come, Granny?"

"Where?"

"Round to the barn. Mr. Jones wants to make some pictures there."

"I don't think I will. I don't want to stand about. Does Mr. Jones know where it is?"

Rose looked at Bamfield.

"Round that side, is n't it?" queried the artful man, pointing in the wrong direction.

Rose blushed. The swiftness of conception of the flagrant piece of humbug appalled her.

"No. I'd better show you." She was swept into his web of deceit on that instant, she felt, and though outwardly unmoved as she led the way, she quivered inwardly at her sense of guilt.

So they went to the barn, and Bamfield disengaged himself of the burden of his photographic apparatus and had a good laugh. Rose laughed, too, and the avowed enjoyment sealed, she felt, their mutual implication in whatever crime might be imputed to them.

"How did I get on with your grandmother?" asked Bamfield.

"Nicely," said Rose. "Mind, she's frightened of you, but I'm sure she likes you more."

"Every one," said Bamfield, "every one likes me more the longer they know me."

"What about my aunt?" said Rose.

"Oh, well, she's different," answered Bamfield.

They spent an hour in and out of the barn. Undoubtedly there was some of the stonework that plainly had never been part of a barn's construction originally. Bamfield pointed it out to Rose, and told her things about architecture and Roman arches, and Gothic, and how bricklayers of different periods worked in different ways. He was full of interesting bits of knowledge. And when he took his pictures, she could see him considering matters carefully, trying views, walking about, shifting his camera backwards and forwards. What, exactly, he would get by way of results, Rose could not surmise, but she felt certain that taste as well as judgment was at work.

He insisted once or twice on getting her into the picture, and made one or two exposures inside the barn. He called her to look into the screen at times, and explained just why he took in this particular bit and left out that. She learned to put in the darkslide and pull out the shutter, to cap and uncap the lens. She spoiled one or two plates for him in doing so, and even that somehow made for friendliness.

Then he took one or two photographs of the

house — a fine old Queen Anne building — and with that all his plates were used up.

"Now," said he challengingly to Rose, "what about tea?"

She flushed. The exalted mood that had seized her at the moment of his visit had simmered down, and — she had to own it — she was timid again. Bamfield saw it.

"Look here," he said. "I was only joking, of course."

"Not at all," she said. "Of course I shall ask you to stop to tea."

"Wait a bit," said Bamfield. "Would n't it be nicer if Mrs. Grampette asked me?"

"But — but —" began Rose.

He struck in: "I know you think she won't. Shall I make her?"

"Can you?"

"I think so. I'm going to try. Leave it to me."

His confidence was superb. He did not even make a pretence of making ready to go. He merely stowed away the camera in the barn and strolled with Rose round to the lawn again. What would he say? thought Rose as they went. Granny was a terrible old lady to manage. The affair of the lens might now fairly be considered dealt with and disposed of, and Aunt Anne's influence had doubtless been at work to his prejudice during the last hour. But as they rounded the corner of the house

she saw that a most wonderful thing had happened.

There, in the shadiest and prettiest part of the lawn, was set a table, elegantly white-clothed, with the best tea service — the very special teapot and milk-jug and sugar-basin reserved for the highest occasions — and four chairs — *four* chairs, mark you! — and in one chair sat Aunt Anne, freshly gowned since lunch-time, and across the lawn to meet them came Granny, newly frocked also, and smiling so affably, and with both hands held out, positively eagerly, and the heartiest welcome for Mr. Jones, expressed unreservedly in word, manner, tone —

"Well, so you've finished your photographing? And now you're going to stay and have tea, are n't you, Mr. Jones?"

Granny was up to him by now, both hands on his arm, smiling charmingly up at him, every possible affability conveyed to him in gesture and look.

Rose and Bamfield both pulled up short. Rose was bewildered. Even Bamfield was nonplussed. No doubt he had had something ready to say, some phrase designed to lead up to an indication of the desirability of inviting him to tea. But to be met in this fashion, with a point-blank invitation, backed up with the evidence of deliberate preparation for his acceptance, was altogether unexpected,

and positively a faint blush of embarrassment tinged his cheek as he accepted, hastily, even stammeringly: —

"Tea? Well — really, if you're sure — Delighted, I'm sure."

Aunt Anne had risen by this time, and, wreathed in smiles also, had come across and joined them. She linked her arm through one of Rose's; Granny linked through the other. Granny and Aunt Anne vied with each other in smiles — smiles at the man Jones — at the caravan man!

He stared at Rose — Rose stared at him. He was puzzled, puzzled, and his active brain, thrusting every way through his bewilderment for some explanation of this marvellous transformation, found nothing and yet persisted in its search.

The maid led him to the bathroom upstairs to wash his hands. He heard Rose's voice outside, "Give Mr. Jones these," and after a tap at the door a brush and comb were handed him. He brushed his hair thoughtfully. Still he quested for explanation. Granny did not puzzle him so much, but Aunt Anne!

Now, as he brushed his hair, his thoughts ran thus, and led him to what, the instant it dawned on him, he felt beyond all possibility of error was the correct solution.

"Lie down!" as he plied the brush diligently on his stubborn hair. "Too long — wants cutting.

Lot of hair I've got. A nuisance, sometimes. Better, though, than bald, like some people — like Monk, for instance. Good old Monk, sagacious old Monk! Glad to have seen him this morning, with his expostulations and his warnings — Warnings of what? 'They'll be taking you for him.' For whom? 'For Lord Bamfylde, the immensely wealthy peer who goes about in a caravan, photoing —' By Jove!"

Bamfield nearly dropped the brush. That was it! That explained Granny and Aunt Anne and — Rose? No, never! She was genuine all through. But these other two — Oh, it was too palpable! He chuckled to himself. What a lark! Silly old fossils! A lord!

Well, let them think so. Why not? Nothing to do with him if they made the mistake. No more ordering off the common, he fancied; no more difficulties in admitting him to the Priory; no more forbidding Rose to speak to him. It was excruciatingly funny. Of course it would n't last long. For one thing, of course, Rose would be told, and it was bound to make a change in her, too. What sort of a change? He thought without effect, and then dismissed the subject. Whatever it was, it would be nothing mean, of that he was sure. But these others —

He was so delighted that he rumpled his hair up and did it all over again.

Bamfield's surmise was perfectly right. Rose and he had scarcely reached the barn that afternoon when Aunt Anne began on Granny.

"Mother," she said, "it's disgraceful. After all your promises, too!"

Mrs. Grampette looked obstinate. "Well, I don't care."

"But look what it means — this wretched man practically compelling us to receive him here, photoing about our place — and Rose with him — she ought to be ashamed of herself — and asking him to take tea! And you, too, Mother, allowing yourself to be photographed! Did you take anything else?"

"Of course not."

"Let me see."

She stretched out her hand to reach Granny's bag. The old lady promptly took possession of it herself.

"Really, Anne, after I've told you!"

Anne was determined. "You were in the village this morning. I must look."

"Really, Anne! — to your mother — and after I've given you my word —"

Anne reached across and took the bag from the old lady's clutch. She put her hand in and withdrew various articles, and, laying them on her lap, spoke bitterly to her mother.

"Three reels of silk — Wiggin's, I suppose?

Some almond rock — really, Mother! 'Seven for a shilling' — " This last was a ticket so inscribed.

"I'm sorry, Anne," explained Mrs. Grampette. "I tried for some of the eggs, but the first one I got I dropped, so I took the ticket. We must send it back."

"And this boot-brush — the Stores?"

"No. Jobson's."

"I'll take them back. Oh, Mother!"

"Don't bully, Anne. Hush! Here's some one —"

The maid appeared with some letters, one for Mrs. Grampette. She opened it, put on her spectacles, and read it, while Anne read through her own correspondence. A startled exclamation from Granny made Anne look up.

"Good gracious!"

"What's the matter?"

"Oh, Anne!"

"What, Mother?"

"The caravan man —"

"What about him?"

"Anne, Anne, we have n't been rude to him?"

"Rude to whom?"

"To the caravan man — the photographer."

"Well, really, Mother! Why?"

"We have n't addressed him improperly? You know, Anne, you can be insulting at times."

"Really, Mother, I think I know by now how to address a man of that class."

"Class! That class! Do you know who he is?"

"A peripatetic photographer of the name of Jones."

"He is Lord Bamfylde."

"Mother!"

"Lord Bamfylde! Oh, Anne, I do hope we have n't said or done anything wrong."

"But how do you know? Who says so? Is it that letter? Who's it from?" Anne was almost as agitated now as Granny.

"It's from your sister Emma — at Brighton. I wrote to her on Saturday as usual, giving her all the news — it was my turn — and here's her reply. She must have sat down and answered at once. See what she says, here — no, here — Where is it? I told her, of course, of the caravan man on the common, and — Oh, here it is. 'The caravan man, as you call him, is n't what you think. You say he takes photographs? Then it's Lord Bamfylde. Immensely wealthy, but eccentric. One of the oldest families in England. Came over with the Conqueror' —"

"Norman architecture!" interjected Aunt Anne. "He said he was an authority on Norman architecture."

"'I enclose you a cutting from the *Daily Smudge*.' Here it is, Anne." Granny held it out. "'I always keep my paper, and I knew that

somewhere in the last six months I'd seen something about this man.' What do you think of it, Anne?"

Anne took the print. It was smudgy. "It is n't very plain," she said.

"Oh, yes, it is," said Granny testily. "Here's his lordship's face — a nice-looking young feller."

Anne looked dubious. "Oh, no, Mother, that is n't his face."

"No?"

"No, that's his horse, turned the other way round. I think this is his face, down here."

"I thought that was his photographic apparatus. Anyhow, read what it says."

Anne read it out. Above the picture was printed: "Takes Photographs," and underneath, "Lord Bamfylde, celebrated as a hunter, not with a gun, but with a camera. Eccentric but distinguished Peer. Roams about England in Caravan, living Bohemian Life."

Anne looked at Granny — Granny returned the look. Then, moved by one impulse, both rose and went to the kitchen to give orders.

Learn now why Rose, a girl of twenty, was treated with an anxious restriction that in the seven years she had lived at the Priory, orphaned of father and mother, might well have warped an ordinary nature into sullenness.

Lucy Grampette, her mother, a wayward, impulsive thing, had run away from the Priory in her twenty-first year, and sought what she imagined would be a life of unending interest and thrill as a dancer.

Spirited, determined never to confess defeat, and, alas! almost totally ignorant of the difficulties of the career she had chosen, she had to experience much of its bitterness. She had a natural faculty, perhaps a genius, for dancing. She learnt that genius goes for nothing without long training, and that twenty-one is a hopeless age to commence to learn. She was spared full knowledge of what stage-life has in keeping for its failures, when she fell in love with and married Clarence Nieugente, a young artist, like herself endowed with talents, and like herself, untrained. They were poor. They lived in Nieugente's studio at Primrose Hill, and there she died, at Rose's birth, a year after their marriage.

To her mother and sister at the Priory her life away from home had been a tragedy. They were wrong. Her stage adventure was a disagreeable but illuminating experience, her marriage year was a time of unbounded happiness. Loving passionately, passionately loved, looking forward with a joy unspeakable to the birth of her child, her swift and painless death ended a period so exalted in spiritual ecstasy that it is scarcely possible to

contemplate the possibility of its long continuance.

Rose, born and brought up in the studio, had much of her mother in her. Her father's death at twelve left her under the control of her grandmother and her aunt. They were women not lacking in ordinary affection. They were fond of the girl, but they were animated by a fear lest she should develop those qualities which had, in their eyes, ruined her mother. They feared her bubbling spirits, winced when she burst into formless song, deprecated even too warm an expression of affection. They must train her — it was their duty. They did their duty. Thank God, the girl found a kingdom within herself where she could sing, dance, dream, fling love around. That saved her.

Undistinguished in habit of thought, the two women took the obvious view of Rose's acquaintance with the newly discovered peer.

"Just fancy, Anne," said Granny. "And only this morning you were scolding Rose —"

"So were you," retorted Anne.

"Oh, dear me, no; I merely advised her."

"Shall we tell her?"

Granny thought it out. "I think not. To such a man as his lordship Rose's very innocence must have a wonderful charm. No, Anne, let it go on, just — just —" She swayed her hands levelly about, to and fro.

"And I suppose we must n't let him know we know?"

"Decidedly not. His lordship chooses to live this — this vagabondish life, in his delightful caravanserai. Well, let him disclose himself in His Own Good Time." She actually glanced up at the sky.

She was talking of a lord, mind you, not The Lord, as you might suppose. But there are a great many quite decent people who feel a little undecided as to which is the more important personage when they meet a peer of the realm in the flesh . . . Others have no doubt whatever . . .

Bamfield, spick and span, came down to the lawn. Rose and Granny were sitting by the table. Aunt Anne met him in the drawing-room as he passed through. As a matter of fact, she had been lying in wait for him. She simply could not rest till this extraordinary matter had been probed deeper. She wanted to put the question plainly and starkly, to him, but dared not. But complete silence was beyond her.

"Mr. Jones," she said. "Mr. Jones —"

Bamfield looked attention.

"Jones," repeated Aunt Anne significantly, and looked hard at him.

"Hush!" said Bamfield.

"I think not," said Aunt Anne. "In fact, I rather fancy Bam —"

"Hush!" said Bamfield.

He laid finger to lip. Aunt Anne nodded.

"Not a word," said Bamfield, "to anybody."

"No," said Aunt Anne.

And Granny and Aunt Anne and Rose and Bamfield had the most delightful of teas in company.

CHAPTER XI

THE faint chime of the clock on Ouseton church striking eight came across the common as Rose, her heart beating quickly with the sense of her audacity, shut quietly behind her the gate of the Priory garden opening onto the common. Breathless day had given place to breathless night. There was no moon, but to the girl's imagination, tingling with expectation, the night seemed to hold a witchery that suffused everything with mysterious light. The sky had taken on an unusual aspect. Spite of the dark she could see the colours of things. A glow went with her as she walked, coming out of the

> "... Night,
> Deep glooming, yet how fraught with light
> From stars innumerable set
> In the wide spaces of the sky's
> Unfathomable violet."

It was a bare minute's walk to the caravan. Among the trees by the pond there shone the ruddy light of Mr. Jones's fire of sticks. She saw the smoke curling up, and the unruffled surface of the pond gleamed redly as she drew near.

There was music, too. More than once this last week from the window of her bedroom, looking out before she got into bed, she had heard faint

music coming from the caravan, and to-night the caravan man was evidently whiling away the time of waiting for her by playing whatever instrument it was he claimed the mastery of.

She came upon him quietly, and unnoticed. He was sitting on the platform of the caravan, leaning against the open door. Evidently he had done grace to her promised visit. His hair was, for once, neatly parted, he had on an immaculately white pair of flannel trousers, and over his sweater a very loose and rather "loud" checked coat, with big pockets. It was so seldom that he appeared to pay any attention to his appearance that Rose felt a little thrill of feminine gratification at the sight of his attempt at personal preparation. He was evoking his melody by way of an instrument not quite strange to Rose, and yet she could not recall its name. She saw it was some variety of organ; that is to say it had a key-board at each end and a bellows in the middle, and it had to be alternately pulled out and squeezed up. Mr. Jones was playing it with some dexterity; the air he evoked was pretty, catchy — reminiscent, so Rose thought, of one of the older operas, and with nothing of humour about it. Yet she had to laugh, and as she did so, wondering why, she saw on the instant it was because the only other time she had seen such an instrument played it had been by a wandering Italian boy, who had ventured into the Priory

garden, and after the merest pretence of a performance had sent forward a monkey on a long chain to solicit alms.

Bamfield suddenly caught sight of her and stopped his harmonies with a crash as he jumped up and came down the steps. Rose touched her forehead with her finger.

"Please, sir," she asked him, "do you want a monkey?"

He stared a moment, then answered her gravely: "So far I have acted as my own monkey, but I might be prepared to entertain a reasonable proposition. Tell me, little girl, why do you ask? Have you a monkey for sale?"

"No, sir, please, sir" — Rose had never spoken to him in this way before, and she felt at once that here was a new thing this wonderful night was bringing out in her — "but I thought perhaps I might suit."

"You! — and why do you wish to be a monkey?"

"Because I have so longed to travel," she assured him.

He perpended a moment. "You understand," he told her thoughtfully, "that your dress would consist largely of a little jacket, probably cut down from the one I'm wearing when I've done with it, and a red fez with a tassel. Do you think you could wear such a dress with the necessary grace?"

"Well," said Rose, "I should like to get the alterations done by my own dressmaker."

"That," said Bamfield, "might be conceded. Your suggestion begins to appeal to me very favourably. Very favourably. There are points about it — for instance, when the dogs bark at you you would have to run to me and jump inside my coat, left open for the purpose, and snuggle there. Do you think you could do that?"

Rose blushed. "I should want time to think. I have n't really considered my own idea very far," she admitted, "and I should have to think it over too."

"Take your time, take your time," said Bamfield heartily. "I think your scheme a good one, and we must n't let little difficulties stand in the way. Mind you, I'm not going to promise, off-hand, to add a monkey to my establishment. For one thing, he, or she, would have to be properly apprenticed. Then there arises the question of the premium."

"What's a premium?"

"A premium is a sum of money which the apprentice's guardian or parent pays down when the apprentice is bound to his master. Generally, it's paid back in wages during the next seven years."

"I don't think," said Rose, "that they'd pay a premium with me."

"It could be discussed," said Bamfield. "Some-

times, in the case of a special apprentice, there is n't any premium."

"Then I suppose there are n't any wages?"

"The head she has!" said Bamfield admiringly. "Shrewd, practical, yet imaginative." He surveyed Rose with enthusiasm — "I'll accept a monkey," he suddenly decided. "I'll waive the premium, cancel the wages, and offer a good home. To a really earnest and persevering monkey, anxious to improve his, or her, position, I would undertake to give every advantage. In time she would be able to take other monkeys as her own apprentices."

"I had no idea," said Rose, "that I'd opened out such a tremendous field of enterprise. I think the scheme's rather running away with us."

"I've developed it a bit, that's all. The idea was yours. We won't come to a decision to-night, though, will we?"

"No," said Rose; "we'll sleep on it."

"Quite so," he agreed; "but if, say, to-morrow morning, you are of the same mind as now, come and see me, bringing with you your birth certificate, a medical report of fitness for the arduous duties of the post, and a magisterial license. I on my part will communicate with the Society for the Supervision of Performing Animals. We could then discuss terms."

"Could n't you give me an idea now of what you will pay me?"

"Um-um," he considered. "I'm horribly poor, you know. The wandering musician earns but scanty guerdon. But with a really nice monkey I would share what I had."

"Well," said Rose candidly, "I don't know what that amounts to if you're so horribly poor. But you're going to share with me to-night, are n't you? Then don't mislead me by giving me a tremendous feast and making me think I'm always going to have a sumptuous time."

"I won't mislead you," answered the caravan man. "Pay no attention to what I set before you to-night. Black bread and goat's milk is all it runs to as a rule. That's honest, is n't it?" he demanded.

It was jolly, Rose felt, talking like this. How Aunt Anne would frown if she heard it! Her thoughts were back at the Priory. "You did n't come to our house this evening," she said.

"Your people did n't expect me, did they?" asked Bamfield.

"I think Granny had half an idea you might look in."

"She said something about it after tea," said Bamfield, "but naturally I would n't let anything interfere with our arrangement. Do they know you've come?"

"No," said Rose. "I did n't tell them anything. I let them think I had gone to my room after din-

ner. I had to sit through dinner and pretend to eat. I suppose it was my guilty conscience made me feel as if they kept looking at me."

"But you are really prepared to eat supper, are n't you?" asked Bamfield.

"Rather! — I'm depending on it." She was standing by the steps of the caravan, and "Mr. Jones" was inside. She waited till he came out with a Chinese lantern, its candle lit, and hung it to a branch of the tree. It made a centre to their little world. Till now there had perhaps been a faint timidity alive in Rose, but in the presence of the red lantern's gleam, this died down.

Bamfield moved about, in and out of the caravan busy with preparations for the meal, while Rose stood filled with delight. At what? She hardly knew; only, about them both there seemed to float a sense of intimacy that belonged to just the circle the Chinese lantern illuminated. Within its dim influence, she felt, were comradeship, adventure, security, and a happy seclusion from to-morrow or yesterday. The time and the place comprehended everything.

"Sit down," said Bamfield, "while I bustle about. Are you glad you came?"

She thrilled as she replied: "Rather! Picnics are jolly, and this sort of moonlight picnic — What are you going to give me to eat?"

It was n't that she really cared very much what

she ate, but the meal was to be part of this tremendous and exhilarating adventure. Something about it seemed to link it up with long-past days, in the old studio at Primrose Hill, when, perhaps, in the evening, some artist friend of her father's would drop in unexpectedly, and there would be pipes going and chat — what about she had forgotten now, but she recalled the happiness. It had been just this sort of happiness.

As she questioned him, Bamfield looked up at her as he knelt by the fire of sticks, fresh blazing, and crackling bravely.

"Ever read 'Pickwick'?"

"I did once."

"Remember Mrs. Bardell?"

"I know! 'Chops and tomato sauce'!"

"Chops and fried tomatoes, in this case. Most chastely simple. I have ambitions as a cook, you know, but I dared not risk failure, with you here. But when you've eaten the chops and tomatoes I shall give you, you shall lay your hand on your heart and tell me if ever the most burning poet in his finest flights could melt his way into your bosom's inmost core as my chops and my tomatoes will do."

She laughed. "Mind!" she warned him. "I'm fond of poetry."

"Poetry!" he sneered. "Wait till you've tasted my chops and tomatoes!"

"Touch wood!" cried Rose.

He scorned her. "If I'm wrong I'll eat the frying-pan. And another thing — I'm going to give you some claret, and when I say *some* claret, I don't mean any sort of claret, but just that particular claret which alone may presume to uncork within hail of these chops — as cooked by me."

"Oh, dear!" said Rose. "Don't think me rude, but — but —" She hesitated.

"Yes?"

"Well, claret — it's going rather a long way, is n't it? You ought to let me pay half."

"Gawd bless you for them kind words, lidy," he answered. "Don't you see, this is my treat? One of these days, if ever we meet again, you shall treat me."

"If ever we meet again!" said Rose. Somehow there was melancholy at the back of the thought. "And if I've got any money."

"Have n't you?" asked Bamfield.

Rose felt how pleasant it was of him to ask her just bluntly like that. She shook her head.

"My face is my fortune," she replied.

Bamfield stared up at her. She was sitting on the tree-root, leaning toward him and the fire. She wore a white dress, her hat and gloves lay by her side, her elbows were on her knees, and the red flame of the fire set her shining hair aglow. Her lips were parted, her eyes bright; she was drinking

in every moment of this wonderful hour. Bamfield looked her over and drew a deep breath.

"Your face is your fortune!" he said. "Ah!"

He had brought out the simple necessaries for their feasting — plates, knives, and forks — and while the chops sputtered their protest at the frying-pan's fiery ordeal, he cut up some tomatoes.

"I say, can't I do something?" asked Rose. She thought she must offer to help, but she felt perfectly happy looking on. She wondered if it were quite right to feel so happy.

"Just sit still and admire me," answered Bamfield, slithering the sliced tomatoes into the frying-pan.

"I do admire you — for the splendid way you got on with my aunt and Granny this afternoon."

He looked up at her with a suppressed grin. "Miraculous, was n't it?"

"The way Granny melted!" said Rose. "Do you know, when she met you coming across the lawn, I really thought for a moment she was going to kiss you. I think," she went on meditatively, "I think you must have reminded her of some one she had known, perhaps loved, years and years ago, when she was a girl."

Bamfield laughed. "I suppose girls did love in crinoline days?" he said. "Why have n't I got pegtop trousers and long side-whiskers? I might win her love to life again. Look here," he said, eye-

ing her closely, "I suppose you really *don't* know why it was I got on so well with your people?"

"No. Why was it?"

"You're sure they did n't mention anything?"

She had already told him, and as she sat there looking straight at him with eyes of utter frankness, he felt a pang of shame at the repetition of his question. But a jumbled excuse seemed to blurt itself out within him. "If she's as true as I'm certain she's true, it's such a joy that I must make sure she's true," was how his thought ran.

"No," said Rose. "Why was it? Was there any particular reason? Is there some secret? Do tell me."

"No, I won't. I was puzzled at first as to why your Aunt Anne, in particular, turned so civil all at once, and then I remembered something a friend of mine told me might happen — and I saw it had. It's quite amusing."

Rose wrinkled her brows, and looked hard at him. "You worry me," she said.

Bamfield laughed. "Don't worry. It's nothing. You tell me you don't know anything about it, so I'm sure you don't. We had a jolly time, did n't we?"

"It was wonderful — such a happy afternoon. You are wonderful, you know."

"Am I? How?"

"I can't say — just wonderful. The things you

do and say." She looked at him with the frankest admiration.

"You wonderful, wonderful thing!" thought Bamfield in return — almost said it, in fact, but checked himself in time.

"I'm really a magician, you know, by trade," he answered gravely, "but I preferred photography. Now, then, supper's nearly ready. Plates hot. Sit nearer. Are you quite comfortable?"

"Yes, thanks," she assured him. "This is just nice."

"Are you warm enough," he went on, "or shall I get a rug?"

"I'm lovely, thanks," she answered. He regarded her consideringly for a second. "I know you're lovely," he said, "but what I asked was, are you warm enough?"

It was venturesome. For a second Rose felt a little uncertain of her own mood. "Really, Mr. Jones," she protested, "you speak to me as if I were a little girl."

Instantly he was apologetic. "Don't be offended. But, you know, at times you do rather remind me of a — a certain little girl I've a sort of acquaintance with." He stopped, musing for a second, and again his eye with a gleam of laughter in it rested on her, and she felt the sense of some knowledge in him that concerned her. Her lips parted in a query, but he struck in, "I'll tell you all about her, one of

these days. Now," changing the subject, "let's look at the potatoes." He dropped to his knees by the fire and commenced to rake among the fringes of its glowing embers with a stick. "Don't you," he asked her as he raked, "don't you love potatoes baked in wood ashes, in their jackets, and roasted absolutely to perfection?"

Rose, who was honestly hungry, felt a little inward stir of primitive feeling glow warm within her as she answered, "Yes."

He had raked out what he sought from the ashes of the fire and was staring at what he now held in his hands. He turned a blank face to her.

"Not like some fellows would do them, eh? All black, and burnt up to cinders."

"No."

He rose with a little sigh, walked a pace or two away towards the pond, and methodically tossed into its shiny blackness four small objects, each falling with a "plomp" one after the other into the water.

"All right," he said solemnly. "Then — then I'd better put some more on." He looked at her tragically.

She clapped her hands delightedly. "I told you to touch wood," she said. "Now, what about the frying-pan?"

"What about it?"

"Are n't you going to eat it?"

He clasped his hands imploringly. "Let me off! The fact is, I'm frightfully nervous. I did so want to do everything in first-rate style — and somehow I've been feeling nervous about it ever since you promised to come. Never mind; I'll soon have some more going. I'll scrub them up. And — have a glass of claret —" He began to pour out a glass from the bottle.

"Let me scrub them," said Rose.

"No, no," he protested. "I'll do it. But wish me luck." He handed her a glass filled with the wine. "Here's luck to my next lot of baked potatoes."

Rose took a sip at the wine and put her glass down. Somehow the accident to his cooking had quite smoothed away the faint sense of strangeness that had prevented her feeling quite at her ease. Here was a domestic matter in which she could speak with authority. She was now in that world of tolerance of man's incapacity in which every woman is a queen in right of her sex. She took charge with easy confidence. "If you really mean me to have potatoes to-night, it won't do to bake them; there is n't time."

"You really intend being home by nine?"

"Yes, really. Let's put them on to boil. Get some water."

She was brisk, businesslike. Bamfield took his orders at once. He dived into the caravan, came

out with a saucepan, flew over to the pond and came back with it nearly full. Then he pulled out a plaited rush basket with quite a lot of potatoes in; Rose selected four, Bamfield got two knives, one for her and one for himself, and they both commenced to peel potatoes.

"Don't peel them so thickly," Rose admonished him. "That's wasteful." Her knife was flying dextrously as she gave him his directions. "Sorry," he said, and honestly laboured to profit by her reproof. She saw him making an effort, and felt pleased. He was frankly conceding her the command of things. It was pleasant to realize that she was in charge of matters. Usually he seemed rather a masterful sort of man, but there was no question now of whose was the hand on the reins.

Suddenly she looked up enquiringly. "Yes?" said Bamfield. She sniffed. "I thought—"

Bamfield sniffed too. "No," he said. "I thought—" said Rose — and with one simultaneous sniff both flung down their knives, dropped the potatoes and leapt to the fire. Bamfield whipped the smoking frying-pan off the flames . . .

"I'm sorry," was all he could say for a minute.

Nothing but the ruddy light of the fire, leaping as if in wild enjoyment of the mischief it had wrought, obscured the fiery flush of confessed ineptitude that mantled over Bamfield's cheeks.

"Oh, Lord! — done for!" He prodded the smoking mass in the pan disparagingly.

Rose looked at him, restraining magnificently the blaze of conscious superiority, almost flaring up into insolent sex arrogance, that flamed within her. She eyed him steadily. "If ever you want a place as *chef*," she could not for the life of her refrain from saying, "refer people to me, will you?"

Even under the blaze of the fire something of Bamfield's blush betrayed itself.

"I hardly know how to look you in the face." It was true. His eye wandered undecidedly into the surrounding night as if in search of succour; the frying-pan wavered unsteadily in his nerveless grip.

"My supper!" she said inexorably. It was lovely to look at him, unsmilingly, almost grimly, and watch his faltering gaze.

Suddenly he pulled himself together like a man. "You shall have it." He buttoned up his coat and put the frying-pan down.

"Where are you going?" asked Rose.

He dived for his bicycle, lying under the caravan. "I'm going into the village. Five minutes there, five minutes back —"

"It's half-past eight — the shops are shut."

"I'll knock one of them up. I'll manage it. You think I'm a fool, and I am a fool, but I'm not such a fool as not to be able to get you something to

eat. Do forgive me. Sit by the fire, and in positively less than a quarter of an hour —"

He was mounted, wavering away. She stopped him.

"Stop!"

He stopped, balancing.

"Don't go!"

He put a foot to the ground. "But I must —"

"No, you must n't. It won't be the least fun to me to stay here alone. Let's sit and chat. I mean it." He saw she meant it, and with a last gesture of apology, dismounted, and came over to her. She sat again on the tree-root. He produced his cigarette-case. "You don't smoke, do you?" She shook her head. He lit one for himself. Her eyes were dancing with merriment. Spite of his mortification he could not help laughing. "I hardly know how to look you in the face. There's the cruet — I don't think there's any mustard in it, but there's some salt and a little pepper — perhaps. And there's some bread — and the claret —" His eye looked past her, and a fresh spasm of embarrassment wavered across it. He struck his thigh with real anger. "I'm blest if I have n't knocked the bottle over!" He stooped and picked it up. It was true. The wine had gone. He pitched the bottle, as he had done the potatoes, into the pond. It gave a sniggering "plop!" as it struck the water.

He had always appeared so cool and ekfident

and easy, that Rose began to feel uncomfortable herself. Trying to turn the edge of his discomfiture, "Is n't this a case for magic?" she asked.

"Magic?" said Bamfield.

"You said you were a magician," she reminded him. "Well, if you really are, here's just the chance to show me what you can do. Have you got your wand handy — or do you usually rub a lamp?"

Bamfield felt grateful to her for her trifling.

"My magic's a bit rusty," he told her, "but if you like we'll give it a chance. Shall I order, or will you? What would you like? — chops and tomatoes?"

"No, thank you." She was decided. "There's something unlucky about chops and tomatoes tonight. If you don't mind, we'll try something else."

"Anything you like," said Bamfield spaciously.

"Then, I think I'd like some — some ham, delicately cut —"

"Cold, I suppose?"

"Yes, cold; cut thin."

"Some ham for the lady, cold, cut thin," Bamfield threw over his shoulder, apparently to an invisible but no doubt attentive genie.

"A nice roll," continued Rose.

"Roll, superior quality," said Bamfield. "Do I share your roll, or am I left out of this supper?"

"You may order two rolls," she conceded. "I am ordering for you as well as for myself."

"Two rolls." Bamfield passed the order on. "And some butter, I presume?"

"Thank you."

"Pray don't mention it. And to drink?"

"Some claret, please."

"Oh, no, no, not claret. Come; to please me, let yourself go a bit. Why not champagne?"

"The expense," she objected.

"Dismiss the thought. To my attendant sprite cost is a negligible factor. Champagne, then. Now, is that all? Ham, rolls, butter, and a bottle — no, let's be lavish — suppose we say, a couple of bottles, of champagne? Right?" She nodded. "Have you got a ring? Yes, that one on your finger."

"It's my mother's."

"Then there's magic in it. Kindly rub it." She rubbed it as he directed. "Slave of the ring," he continued in a deep bass voice, "you hear the lady? Appear, with the articles enumerated . . ."

He did not fall over, he merely sat still as a stone, after one little gasp; but Rose, leaning forward, with a start, clutched at his arm.

From the gloom of the tree under which they sat came a movement, the approach of a human figure, moving carefully, bearing more than one small burden. Moving a trifle unsteadily out of the shadows, the form of Mr. Jarge Gubbins materialized before their eyes.

In his present attire Mr. Gubbins had struck — and struck extremely loudly — that note of gaiety which throughout the ages has been acclaimed by the great mass of human opinion as the correct one for an occasion such as that in which he had that morning borne a principal part. A white and glossily ironed waistcoat, a blue-and-yellow tie, a coat and trousers of a grey ground over which was drawn with firm and uncompromising hand a cross-pattern of black-lined squares; light-brown boots, a soft grey hat — carve him in stone and tint him, and you had for all time an embodiment of the soul of man walking hand in hand with merriment. And if his gait hinted at a pretty waywardness, if his speech struck you less in its clarity of diction than in its hearty good-nature, why, there are times and seasons, look you, and there are other times and seasons. The austerities of human conduct may with propriety relax on occasion, within reason; nay, there are moments when a rigid adherence to the rule of every day may be said to smack of actual impropriety. The morning trappings of woe were for the most part disposed under his arm in a bundle. The hat that had so malignantly mocked in its ironic proclamation of grief the inward hilarity of its wearer was now borne, crape band and all, by the rim, in his hand, plainly a despised and rejected thing.

Happy, hospitable, beaming, he came forward

with a wide-footed stride to where Rose and Bamfield, sitting motionless on the tree-roots, waited the unfolding of his mission. In his right hand he bore two dinner plates, their concave surfaces opposed to each other; one might reasonably conceive that they bore between them a delectable edible.

He wagged his head at Bamfield. "You did n't coom down this arternoon, mister," he said. "We wus expeckin' you." He caught sight of Rose and touched the brim of his hat with the brim of the crape-bound topper he carried. "Oh, good-evenin', Miss Nieugente. I w's sayin' to this young feller, 'e did n't coom as we expected. Dolly, my new missis, she ses to me not 'arf an hour ago, 'I expect 'e 's shy-like, this bein' our weddin' night.' ''E don't seem to want narthin' to dew wi' our 'am,' I ses, 'but arst 'im I did, and 'ave it 'e shall,' so I cuts 'im off 'is share, and up I pops."

Rose saw Bamfield's lips faintly moving, caught a reference to "Jarge, my preserver," and what sounded like a quotation regarding Providence, and drunken men, and fools.

Mr. Gubbins had removed the top one of the two plates in his right hand. As if interested in the proceedings, a merry little flame curled up from the fire and had a look. There was displayed a generous quantity of thin slices of a ham that at a glance you could tell touched the pinnacle of

ham's possibilities of achievement. He knelt down before the other two and deposited his offering on the grass. More was to come. One by one Mr. Gubbins took from under his arm other gifts.

"'Ere," said he, unwrapping some tissue paper, "'ere's some rolls, an' some butter as Dolly made 'erself — for rolls, fancy bread, an' butter you won't meet Dolly's equal in a long day's march. And — well — I dunno' 'ow you fancies this sort of stuff, but there's a couple o' bottles, Dolly and me ain't got no use for it — good old ale for ever, I ses, — but Dolly's uncle in Lunnon, 'e sent us down a dozen bottles — you may as well 'ave a go at it, and if you likes it there's the rest when you wants it."

Still the two on the tree-root sat almost motionless while Mr. Gubbins displayed on the grass before their eyes, in the bright light of the inquisitive flame, the ham, the rolls, the butter, and finally two bottles, sloping-shouldered, wrapped delicately round the throat with silver paper, below which one spied a white label, on which was written a title in a delicate copper-plate hand —

"There!" said Mr. Gubbins, in conclusion, resting on one knee.

Bamfield roused to motion. He stood up, and with the gesture of a king doing honour to some returned victorious general, he raised Mr. Gubbins from his kneeling posture.

"Jarge," he said with feeling, "I have no words." He shook Mr. Gubbins by the hand.

Rose also stood up. She was a little breathless. She had really felt a little frightened on Mr. Gubbins's first entry. Do not smile superior at her. Rub a ring, as she did, make a request to unknown forces and agencies, and get on that instant an answer amply, generously acquiescing, and are your nerves so steady as to be beyond all tremor?

"We're very much obliged to you, Mr. Gubbins," said Rose.

The owner of the watercreese beds bowed with manly grace, keeping his feet well apart as he did so. "Welcome, Miss Rose." He meant it in his country fashion.

The plain man in Bamfield instantly responded. "Jarge, you must stay and have supper with us. Must n't he, Miss Rose?"

"Nunno," said Gubbins archly; "two's company. Good-night, master; good-night, Miss Nieugente."

"Well, good-night, Jarge," said Bamfield. "I said it before, and I say it again — my preserver."

"We're very, very much obliged, Mr. Gubbins," said Rose.

Gubbins beamed kindly. "Lord love 'ee, miss, ye're welcome . . . Shall I sing ye a song afore I go?"

Rose looked at Bamfield. Bamfield, spite of a real gratitude, was quite willing to see the back of

Gubbins, but, all things considered, thought it best to humour him.

"Go on, Jarge. What was the one you sang all the way home from the Pink and Lily?"

"'Dadder and 'is ladder'?" suggested Mr. Gubbins.

"That's it."

Mr. Gubbins smiled broadly, cleared his throat, and commenced his song:—

"My ol' dadder, 'e coom acrass the medder,
An' he brart along a ladder, as 'andy as could be.
O the fruit won't get no redder, an' I'll be all the gladder
When I picks a prarper basket from my gert apple-tree."

Bamfield had strolled over to the caravan, and from the driver's seat had picked up his concertina. He felt for a chord or two, found the key, and by the end of the verse was putting in a harmony.

"The blind cow coom"—went on Mr. Gubbins— "as quiet as a shadder,
Jest as fancy led 'er, so ladylike an' free.
Nothin' could be sadder w'en her harns caught in the ladder,
And dadder took a header down his gert apple-tree."

Full accompaniment this time. Mr. Gubbins appreciated it, and let his voice ring nobly out:—

"Then dadder 'e got madder than an adder, yes, an' badder,
At the ladder in the shadder an' the cow that could n't see.
An' parson who was passin' left us word that dadder had a bad a-
—Ttack of somethin' narsty round his gert apple-tree."

That last verse went in great style and at its finish Mr. Gubbins did quite an excellent toe-dance, a most surprising and unexpected performance, staggery at the finish, but successfully concluded.

Rose clapped; so did Bamfield; and Gubbins, skilful to retire with all the wonder of success waving about him, took a resolute leave. "Now I must be off, and 'ome to bed's soon's I've a done with these ol' blacks o' mine."

"What are you goin' to do with them, Jarge?" asked Bamfield, really curious.

Jarge shook his head, cunningly. "Nunno, don't arsk me. I'm going to 'ave a lark with 'em — never you mind what. You'll see. Coom down to the farm to-morrer and you'll see what I done with 'em. I'm goin' to 'ave my own back." He grinned heartily at his own joke. "Good-night, Miss Nieugente. I must be off. It's early yet, but what I say is, if a man won't go 'ome early on 'is weddin' night, w'y, w'en will 'e go 'ome?"

Propounding this riddle, he moved away, a little unsteadily, and vanished into the night, turning once to wave the crape-bound top-hat to the two by the fire. One might note that his left foot was not sure as to the way he wanted to go. His right foot, however, was quite sure — and quite wrong . . .

"Well!" said Rose, drawing a long breath.

Bamfield began to examine the two bottles.

"The least we can do now is to drink Mr. Gubbins's very good health, Miss Rose. I have n't champagne glasses, but from this label I anticipate something that will excuse the glass." He filled the two claret glasses, and Rose felt she could do no less than drink the toast heartily — "Gubbins — God bless him!"

But she was really hungry now. "Supper, quick!" she commanded.

Bamfield dropped on his knees beside her. "My word! there's enough ham for three —"

"Quick, then," said Rose; "you know you've been starving me."

He handed her a plate with some ham on, helped himself, passed her the crust, the rolls, the butter —

What wonder in that meal! At times Rose found herself in doubt whether all this delightful hour were not a piece of magic, witchcraft, a dream which a cunning necromancy had informed with a realism that must, however, suddenly dissolve and leave her dismally awake and disappointed.

But there — she looked round — was the caravan, lights gleaming prettily through its little windows, its half-opened door; there was the fire, the trees seen shadowily, the vague blackness of the lake behind the reeds, the caravan man himself, crouched near her, eating ham, buttering his roll — It was all true. No dream, this.

He looked up at her, held her eye for a minute.

Perhaps he read something of her delight, for he smiled very pleasantly.

"Well, what do you think of my ham?" he asked.

"Yours!" She stared at him coldly. "You may thank Gubbins for saving you from a most humiliating situation."

He put his knife and fork down. "I like that! Here's gratitude! At your request I perform under your nose an elaborate and exhausting miracle, and — well, really, after this —" He took up his knife and fork again, and attacked his supper with an air of having, from this moment, abandoned her to her unreason.

She giggled. "It's delicious ham. Mr. Jones, is it as nice as I think, or is it just having it like this — you know, out here — by your fire?"

"I think," he answered, "the ham is a very fair ham, but, candidly, the super-excellence you detect is probably due to your having it with me, I expect. Agreeable company means so much when one's eating."

Rose looked at him with compressed lips. "Your fault, Mr. Jones, if you *have* a fault — I say, *if* you have a fault — is over-modesty. Try to think a little more of yourself. Cultivate self-esteem."

He lifted a deprecating hand. "Don't urge me to. It is so foreign to my nature. Is n't this butter wonderful?"

"Top hole. And the rolls, scrumptious."

"Ha, ha, ha! Go on; I like to hear you use slang."

She felt rebuked. "It seems to go with the ham — and the fire — and your jolly old caravan, and talking like this. I'm a little blackguard, are n't I, talking with my mouth full?"

Bamfield laughed. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Rose in return. "Oh, don't make me laugh!" She leaned back a little. "What are we laughing at?"

Bamfield could only laugh again. It was fun — and she was so — was so — Impossible to pick the right word for her.

She went on: "Does n't a fire in the open at night make you feel —"

"Yes?"

"I don't know." She looked around. "Whatever do people live in houses for, like plants in a pot? This is jolly. I do like being here. You said this afternoon, you'd have something to show me to-night. What is it?"

Bamfield put his plate aside and rose. "This is n't quite the light to see it in," he remarked.

He went into the caravan and brought out a painted canvas and handed it to her. She looked at it eagerly. She was puzzled. Was it a tremendously clever thing? No, she decided. It was so simple — the pond, painted from the other side, with the old tree and the red-wheeled caravan half

hidden in its shade; a piece of broad work, masterly simple, with the gigantic confidence that Bamfield had found within himself only since he had resigned his studio life and widened the scope of his effort.

Its very simplicity daunted Rose. Yet it caught her too.

"It's wonderful," she said. "That is to say, it's quite good. The pond — yes — When did you do it?"

" 'Early one morning, just as the sun was rising —' " lilted Bamfield.

" 'I heard a maid sing —' " she went on with the song. "Oh, if you could only finish it."

Bamfield moved nearer, leaning against the tree trunk, and looking down at his own work as she held it.

"Finish it?" he said.

"Of course," said Rose firmly. "It wants smoothing up." Bamfield's tremendous brushwork was something a little beyond her.

"Wants smoothing up! Oh, does it?"

"Certainly. You ought to work this up." She regarded it again at arm's length. It certainly was promising, most promising. "If you like," she went on, "I'll show you how to go on with this."

"You are good," replied Bamfield gratefully. "You — you know a lot about painting, I suppose?"

Rose looked up at him with modest pride. "I have two South Kensington certificates," she replied.

The tone was lovely. Bamfield hugged himself with sheer joy. She was not boasting; she was merely stating, with modest reserve, a fact that had an important bearing on their relations and his possible future.

"Two!" said Bamfield, with never a flicker of a smile. "Two certificates! Oh, I say!"

"What?"

"Is that quite fair? — two certificates, when so many, perhaps thousands, of people have n't got even one? I say, you did n't cheat, did you?"

She reassured him earnestly, flushing a little. "Of course not — I would n't."

"Of course, I ought to have known. Still, you must be frightfully clever."

"Oh, no, I'm not. Don't you think that for an instant. But I worked hard. You see, I had two hours' painting twice a week for nearly two years."

"Really?" said Bamfield, and appeared lost in thought. "Do you think, if I worked hard, that I could get into your style?"

"Why not?" she answered encouragingly, and scrutinized the picture at arm's length again. "Really, this is quite promising. Do you like painting?"

"Yes."

"Then why don't you learn?"

Bamfield looked at her yearningly. "Do you really think I could?"

("I'm a rotten cad," he said to himself, "but I can't help it. She's — she's — oh, she's simply the sweetest!")

Rose considered him gravely. "I feel sure you could. You must have tried before, have n't you?"

"Once or twice," admitted Bamfield.

"Then why not keep on with it? How pleasant it would be for you on dark evenings, when you don't know what to do with yourself." Bamfield laughed. "What is it?" asked Rose anxiously.

Bamfield checked his chuckle. "Oh, I was thinking what a fool I've been not to think of it before — art as a harmless hobby for dark evenings. It would — well, it would keep me out of the pubs, don't you think?"

She looked distressed. "Don't speak like that. I can't believe that of you. Of course, it means a lot of study — a lot of study. But you would persevere. You might be able to paint up some of your photos."

"Great!" responded Bamfield, with eager interest. "So I might. Genuine hand-coloured, five shillings a dozen extra."

"Or even more," said Rose earnestly. "Don't think me rude, but when I think of you, all alone in a caravan, I do so feel that you ought to be

making something of a position for yourself. And, you see, you might make quite a name."

"And get a shop?"

"Yes. Oh, you're laughing at me!" For the life of him Bamfield could not quite smother the ghost of a grin. "Very well, then. I was silly to speak about it." She felt hurt.

"Not a bit," said Bamfield. "Come, let's drink to the success of the lessons you're going to give me. Now, look here. Tell me, would you seriously advise me to drop photography and try to learn to paint?"

Rose hesitated. "Well —"

"Come, now," said Bamfield firmly. "I want your advice. Shall I?"

Rose felt her position keenly. Her enthusiasm had carried her away. She had been urging him on perhaps too irresponsibly, and here she was confronted with the fact that apparently his future was to depend on her advice. It was a thrilling thought, but a terrifying.

"You make me frightened," she confessed. "I know it's a difficult thing to throw up one — career — and take up another. You see, you've got — well, a living at least in your photography, have n't you?"

"That's it — that's just what I'm thinking," said Bamfield.

"And suppose you threw that away and did n't

really succeed at painting? How much do you earn?"

"It varies. Sometimes it's as much as two pounds, even two pounds ten, in a week. Another week it may be only a sovereign."

"H'm! That's not so very much, is it?"

"No?"

"Not for a photographer," she said judiciously. "But I dare say it would be rather a lot for an artist. But then an artist can paint all the year round, while I don't suppose you do much photography in the winter."

He shuddered. "The winter — the winter's a terrible time. Don't talk about the cruel winter."

He did it very well, but even Rose had to look hard at him.

"I wish," she said, "that this fire were a little brighter."

He poked the fire. "There you are, then. Why?"

"I thought, perhaps, if I looked at you in a better light, I might tell if you're talking seriously."

"Do you doubt me?"

"Sometimes. That's rude, is n't it? But — you know — I can't help feeling — how queer — You're only a photographer, jogging about in a caravan and afraid of hardships in winter. Afraid — *you!* You don't look as if you would be afraid of anything — not easily. And yet you ask me if I would advise you to go in for painting. Do you

know, I feel as if I could say, 'Yes, go in for any thing. Don't be afraid. Dare it! Dare it!' Oh, you would succeed! I know — I feel it in me — you would! You can't have tried — Why do you look at me like that? Am I silly?"

Bamfield drew a deep breath. "You're — No, never mind."

She had been leaning forward as she spoke, her eagerness and interest in him displaying themselves unchecked, in her face and her eyes a spark of that divine fire that, leaping from the feminine to the receptive male, has set the world aflame before now.

She retreated within her own borders again, shyly. "And if you make a great success, and grow rich as rich, give me your old caravan."

"What do you want it for?"

"I wish I had it now. Would n't I wander!" She stood up. "I'd fly about —"

"Oh, no, you would n't," interrupted Bamfield, lighting a cigarette. "Seen my mare? Her flying days are done."

"I'd coax her. I'd go all over England, up to high mountain tops —"

"My poor Egeria! If you knew how she suffers from nerves."

"She need n't come right up."

"She would n't."

"Would she wait for me at the bottom?"

"Ah, now you have it! You've guessed her secret! Waiting for you — motionless — for hours — still as a marble horse — faithful Egeria, that's her great stunt!"

"I'd bathe in lonely lakes and rivers."

"Forty shillings and costs every time," said Bamfield.

"I don't care. I'd wander on seashores, over moors. I'd let the winds blow about me. I'd go through France, Italy, Spain, Egypt —"

"Egeria's going to have a wonderful old age. The grand tour to wind up with."

"I'd wander for ever and ever. In a hundred years, travellers would report that somewhere in the Sahara or on Siberian steppes, they'd passed a wrinkled old woman, with her knees to her nose and her nose to her chin, driving along in a creaking old caravan —"

"Some creak!"

"With an attenuated mare —"

"And some attentuation!"

"And she'd sent home word to her granny not to worry, and she was coming home when she was tired of it. Oh, Mr. Jones —" She pulled up hastily in her rhapsody.

"What is it?"

"Am I talking too much?"

"Not a bit. Why?"

"A dreadful thought's just struck me. You

know, I'm not used to champagne." She sat down, with a gleam of apprehension usurping in her face the glow of a few seconds before. "Am I — is it possible —?"

"Not unless you want to get up and dance," Bamfield reassured her gravely.

"But I do! Let me see." She looked round doubtfully. "One caravan, one fire — and there's you." She started. "Two plates, though! Yes, there are two. It's all right. Now I promise to talk sensibly."

Bamfield laughed. Rose joined in. Their merriment rang pleasantly together under the tree. The fire flickered. Bamfield threw some more sticks on. It leapt up, making the darkness about them more solid. The red Chinese lantern swayed in a light breeze. Rose sat smiling down at Bamfield, who smiled up in return. Both were thrilling.

"You're not afraid of being romantic, are you?" he said.

"No," she responded. "I suppose it's my father's blood in me. Talking to you about painting has made me think of our old studio at Primrose Hill. I wonder who lives there now, and if he's scrubbed my picture off the wall."

"He has n't." Bamfield rapped that out before he could check himself.

"How do you know?" she asked in some astonishment.

"It's obvious he would n't. Do you think you could go back to live in a studio?" ("Now, why do I ask that? Steady, Bamfield, my lad!")

"I'd love to!" Rose answered, clasping her hands. "It was such a queer, lovely life, so scrapy for money, but so — so — different from any other — except, perhaps your caravan. I'm a bohemian. It's the spirit of the caravan getting hold of me. I feel like a gipsy — as if I could crawl into a little tent of sticks and skins and sleep till morning, and get up, and — and gather bulrushes, and take them into the towns to sell them."

"Good," said Bamfield. "And I'll come with you and steal chickens."

"No, no," she objected. "We'd be honest gipsies, if we starved for it."

"We should, if we were honest gipsies. They all starved long ago."

"Well, then, I'd turn cart-wheels for pennies."

"Heavens, no!" he objected. "I'd rather work, bitter though it might be to my proud gipsy nature. Or — I tell you what — you should tell fortunes. 'Shall I tell your fortune, my pretty gentleman? Ah, it's the wicked eye you've got!"

"Oh, yes; they always say that. Why do men like to be told they've got wicked eyes?"

"The best men don't. I don't. But you could tell fortunes."

"Could I?"

"Of course. Tell mine."

"Shall I?" She hesitated, blushing a little, but he shifted nearer and put his hand into hers, and she took up the rôle of fortune-teller, leaning forward to peer at the lines in his hand. "What's this line? Life, of course." She perpended a moment. Then, "You'll live to be a hundred and forty," she announced.

"A hundred and forty! One of the real old lads of the village!"

She went on more confidently: "You will marry."

"Only once?"

"Four times."

He protested. "But I've given away my beautiful carpet-sweeper! Is n't there some mistake?"

"No," she answered, a superb decision having by now been adopted as the proper professional pose. "See that line? That's Providence."

"Huh!" he ejaculated scornfully. "Why don't you learn your job properly? That came off the handle of the frying-pan."

She swept his objection aside. "I don't care. There's the line. You and Providence and the frying-pan can argue it out among you. You'll see a lot of trouble."

"A lot of trouble — four times married. No inconsistency so far, I admit."

"You will have — let me see — one, two, three, four, five children."

He tried to pull his hand away. "Don't be absurd! Think of the price of boots."

She held his hand firmly. "Don't be a coward. Besides, children are lovely. The first four will be boys."

"Will they wash their necks?"

She could not check the gleam of fun that for a moment peeped out of her eyes and spoiled the priestess-like gravity of countenance she had assumed as part of her professional make-up.

"Boys, I said."

Bamfield accepted it. "All right," he said, tossing his cigarette end away, and shifting closer. "What's the other?"

"The other — the other's — I'll let you guess."

He looked away, thought hard, then, with a gleam of happy discovery, "A girl?" he ventured confidently.

"Right. Right, first time!" She approved his cleverness. "And she'll be such a beautiful little girl, twelve years old."

"When will she be twelve years old?"

She examined his hand again with close attention. "Just before her thirteenth year."

"Are n't you clever!" he returned her, warmly. "Shall I be rich?"

"Frightfully."

"When do I marry?"

"Soon."

"What's her name?"

"I don't know."

Bamfield was on his knees before her. She leaned back from him and dropped his hand. Something of tension came into the atmosphere. Bamfield sensed it first, made an effort to keep the conversation on the lines of sheer jesting—and failed.

"You're not much of a gipsy," he said. "Tell me, does anybody love me?"

"I don't know."

"My good girl, you don't appear to have served a proper apprenticeship to your trade. You must n't keep on saying 'I don't know.' You must have a stock of plausible lies at hand."

"Oh, no, please!" She flushed even at the jest of such a thing.

"Well, then, I'm afraid we must surrender this idea of fortune-telling and fall back on catherine-wheels, unless" — with a touch of bitter resignation — "unless you really intend to compel me to work, after all?"

"Come, be fair," she said. "I think I did pretty well."

"Yes, until it came to the part that mattered."

"How did it matter?" She ought not to have said that, she felt, and grew nervous.

"Don't you think I want to know?"

"Then, ask her — No, don't ask her."

"Shan't I?" Bamfield was breathing fast now. Somehow their hands were joined again, but it was hers in his this time.

"No." She stood up — so did Bamfield. "Oh, don't!" She got her hand free and moved away, a little nervous. "What a lovely night it is!" She turned to him. "Listen," she said, holding up her hand. "What is it in the air to-night? This is enchantment. Hark — to the music — don't you hear?" Her face was rapt, startled.

"I hear," said Bamfield gravely.

"Oh," she said, "to dance, to music, here — now —"

"Dance," said Bamfield. "Go on."

She put her hand to her heart. "If I dared —" She was strangely moved, panting.

"You do dance, don't you? You can?" Something about her as she stood there in the shadows, her white dress gleaming, seemed to assure him of that.

She answered him, quick-breathing, eager. "Mr. Jones, I can dance. My mother was a dancer. She ran away from here to be a dancer. Father told me she was the most wonderful thing. Dancing was born in me. I love it. I used to dance to my father in the old studio when I was a little girl. He loved to watch me. But when he died and they brought me here they told me I must n't do it."

Bamfield had stooped and picked up his concertina from the grass. He slipped his hands into the end-straps, got his fingers on the keys, urged the bellows. Grotesque, harsh, yet in their bizarrerie somehow in key with the gaunt light from the fire, the harsh, uncompromising shadows that shut them in, a chord or two moved quietly about them. "Dance," he said.

"I must n't," she said reluctantly. "But, oh, I want to. Sometimes my heart aches to dance. I have n't danced for seven years now."

He knew by now something at least of his influence over her. He used it.

"Dance," he said compellingly: "just a little — to show me. Go on — no one will know. Listen."

The vagrant chords began to move in rhythm, the tune took shape, catchy, lilting, not loud, but alluring. She felt the melody embracing her, catching at her feet. She began to sway, her feet almost against her will began a figuring on the short crisp turf, the power of the rhythm and the melody took her and she danced.

He gave her room as her light body swung and swept across the grass under the trees. The fire leapt up to watch, as, her hesitation vanishing in the pleasure of the ordered movement, her deft feet took her balancing body to and fro. Nothing impetuous, nothing of exertion, but in the easy occasional lift of hands and arms, swaying of torso,

bending of waist, turn of head, she exhibited a thousand moving graces. Her thin dress flowed about her like water, rippling, swirling, floating and in the multitudinous play of its folds the ceaselessly changing loveliness of her light limbs, now almost lost, now flashing out in firm outline, offered acceptance and accentuation to the rhythm of the music.

To Bamfield the dance itself meant little, but within his breast that exultation in beauty which lay at the basis of his five senses began to burn like a fire. She was exquisite. It was beauty itself that fluttered shadowily before him, moving with utter spontaneity, yet observant of the time his fingers measured out. . . . She was tiring, her breath coming fast. He wound up with a bar or two of finale, and she stopped. Unsteady, breathless, she swayed near him, and put out her hand to balance herself. It caught his arm and rested there for a second.

At that touch he suddenly lost all control. He caught her to him, slid his arm round her shoulders, drew her back a little, and as her face lifted in question, he kissed her.

For a second she submitted, unresisting, her lips, half parted a little, turned up to his, her hands raised in what was as much acquiescence as astonishment; then he felt her body tighten, and she pushed him away and stepped from him.

"That was n't fair," she panted. "You were n't fair. I did n't know where I was."

The man of thirty-three was himself again, after that one instant of abandonment. He put the concertina down and frowned gloomily. "No," he said quietly; "it was n't fair. I'm ashamed. I ask your pardon."

She looked at him rather pitifully, and opened her lips as if to speak, but remained silent.

He came over to her. "I had to do it — you were so lovely, dancing."

She shrank away. He leaned toward her, putting himself in bonds and at the same instant straining to break them. "You need n't fear me. You're beautiful, are n't you? Yes, yes, don't pretend," as she glanced at him for a second with a deprecating gesture. "Every beautiful woman knows she's beautiful. You've looked in your glass a thousand times and known yourself lovely. But you don't know how beautiful you are. You can't. But I know. I know what beauty is in a woman. If you want to know how lovely you are — not in words, but if I could paint you — then you'd know."

She was rosy-faced now. "And that was all?" she asked. "That was just why you kissed me?"

"What else?" he answered.

"I thought — perhaps — you might care — a little."

Bamfield took a second or so before he made reply. Then he put one foot on the big root by which she stood, reluctant to stay, unwilling to go, afraid of what he might say, anxious to hear him speak. He looked consideringly up at her. Dimly she felt that somehow the moment had gone. Bamfield spoke.

"Care? How long have I known you? A week? Can a man learn really to care for a woman in that time? I mean, in the way that matters. I'd like to answer you, but I must give you nothing but the truth, and I hardly know. If I were ten years younger, I'd tell you, yes, I love you for yourself. But I'm doubtful of myself because I know how beauty like yours gets hold of me and confuses me."

She was chilled, and yet in his speech, stumbling and halting in its delivery, she felt the sincerity of his feelings, confused as they were.

"You might try to think how your answer humiliates me." She had to make that much of protest.

Bamfield was a little more himself. "You're hurt," he said rapidly. "Don't be. Seeing you here, in this light, I'm carried away by feelings I can't sort out. Let me see you again, often, till all sense of your mere beauty goes and all I know is *you*. When I have forgotten whether you are beautiful or not, I shall know whether what's in my heart is truly love or not."

Poor Rose! She told herself that he was apologizing very properly for his unpardonable rudeness, and yet — how sadly it was ending!

"Let me go," she said. You will note that he was not detaining her in any way; her hands were free — his on his hips, yet she said, "Let me go."

At that he took her hand again. "I think so much of you that I dare n't risk a mistake. I'll tell you this much —no other woman on earth claims that much" — he snapped his fingers — "of me. There's no other woman I'd turn my head to look at. I swear that." He looked earnestly up at her face, and the frown of his gaze compelled her for an instant to look into his eyes. "You believe me, don't you?"

All she could say was, again, "Let me go, please!" In her heaving breast her heart told her, "It's true — it's true. There's no other woman."

"I don't think I shall let you go," he told her. "I think I shall keep you. You think I've behaved unpardonably, and yet, if only I could keep you here, perhaps the words would come to me to show you how easily you might forgive me." She felt the genuineness of his words, and a fresh flood of content swept through her. "Won't you stay?" she heard him go on — and then, in the queerest fashion, a change, startlingly abrupt, came into his voice. "Oh, I forgot — no — of course I must n't keep you. I'll see you to the Priory."

At that change she froze. "Pray don't trouble."

"Of course I shall," said Bamfield, politely insistent.

She was ice. "I'd rather you did n't. I prefer to go home by myself. It is n't three minutes. I mean it. Good-night." She was off.

"Oh, I say —"

"Good-night." She was inexorable.

"What about the picture? I meant it for you —"

She permitted herself one flash of open resentment. "Keep your picture," she tossed him over her shoulder — and was gone. Her face was burning. She tingled with shame from head to foot. Thank God, she was too angry to let the tears come but — oh, it was intolerable! — he had kissed her, and then dismissed her.

Bamfield was sick at heart. He could not know that she was hurt, but her anger was evident. And yet what could he do? As he had held her hand, detaining her under the impulse of a fresh insurgence of tenderness, his eye had fallen on his wrist watch and he had noted the time — nearly half-past nine. It was not that he had promised Rose should be home by nine — those promises, thank God, lovers make only to break inevitably — but the girl from the post-office was to be here at half-past nine, and with the touch of Rose's lips still on his, he could not bear the idea of the two girls meeting.

And now — Rose was gone, head up, her "Keep your picture" flung contemptuously at him as she went. He stood dejected, the despised picture hanging loose in his grasp, a great melancholy possessing him. Rose's figure faintly seen in its white dress glimmered away into the shadows.

"Let me have the picture," remarked a voice in his ear, so very close that he jumped.

A hand reached out from behind him, took the picture from his hand—he wheeled round abruptly.

There, holding the picture with both hands, smiling a deprecating smile, stood a gentleman of most evidently Oriental extraction: a neat little man, with a very large nose dominating his clean-shaven face, and a dapper dress, which engaged your attention the instant you looked at him, because its very correctness, its black morning coat, fawn waistcoat with a white slip at the neck opening, shepherd's-plaid trousers, boots with white gaiter-tops and pearl buttons, Trilby hat to match the waistcoat in hue, made him seem so absurdly incongruous in that place, where but a few minutes before Rose, like a creature of the woods, had danced. At sight of him a passion of wrath suddenly flamed up in Bamfield's countenance. He took one furious stride towards the intruder, who immediately skipped nimbly backwards, still facing him, his face, his whole attitude invested with an air of deprecating friendliness.

"Iffelstein!" burst from Bamfield. "And where have you come from? Have you been here long?" He took another hasty step forward, and again his visitor skipped nimbly away from him.

"Good-evening, Mr. Bamfield," he replied. "Only half an hour or so. I did n't want to intrude, so I waited behind the tree" — he waved the picture at the tree under which the vagabond supper had taken place — "till the young lady went. You won't mind me, Mr. Bamfield?" — Bamfield, hands gripped, moved dreadfully towards him. He moved away in response, always keeping out of arm's length, always keeping his front elevation opposed to Bamfield's face — or shall we say, his rear elevation guarded from Bamfield's foot? At the same time he spoke rapidly. "I want this picture — Oh, do wait a minute. I want a lot of pictures; I want all your pictures. Come, Mr. Bamfield," he continued persuasively, — here, as he backed, his heel caught in a finger of the tree-roots, and only a very dextrous backward spring kept him from sprawling on his back. "Come — I'm your old friend. I'll give you fifty for this, and fifty each for as many more as you can let me have."

Bamfield edged him up to the fire, leapt at him — he was over the fire like a flash, but the picture was in Bamfield's hands. He put it down on the ground against the tree-trunk, and began to

stride more swiftly than ever after Mr. Iffelstein, who, however, continued to gyrate in front of him and just out of his reach.

"You take me for Bamfield the artist, don't you?"

"Why, Mr. Bamfield, of course you're Bamfield the artist, and I want — "

Bamfield cut him short. "Well, I'm not. My name is Jones — understand? Jones, photographer."

"Anything you like, Mr. Bamfield — Jones, I mean — so long as we can do a bit of business together."

"Business, you blighter!" Bamfield had fairly lost his temper. To his resentment at this man's intrusion on his parting with Rose was now piled the long-pent-up detestation accumulated through years of what on Iffelstein's side were undoubtedly "bits of business together." He leapt forward and this time caught his man, caught him by the lapels of his coat, and held him tight, shaking him vigorously as he endeavoured to wriggle away.

"You sucked my blood," hissed Bamfield, the painful state of alarm depicted on Mr. Iffelstein's face somehow calling him to an essay in melodramatics. "You vampire, you sweater — you finish here!" Mr. Iffelstein, with a desperate effort, swung himself round, without, however, loosening Bamfield's grip on his coat. Bamfield sensed the

proximity of the pond. The feet of the two men slipped on its crumbling edge. He pulled Iffelstein towards it, despite his frantic struggles. "I'll drown you. In you go. There's forty feet of water here!"

"Oh, don't say that, Mr. Bamfield!"

"Well, forty inches," said Bamfield. "Come on!"

Mr. Iffelstein made one last and immense effort to save himself, but the memories of many a picture sold for little more than the cost of studio rent and canvas nerved Bamfield's arms. The two men tottered on the brink of the pond, just above the reed-bed. They swayed, leant over towards the black water—one savage wrench, and Bamfield had freed himself from the despairing clutch and with a mighty flop the figure of Mr. Iffelstein went walloping into the depths.

A cry, most dismal, rent the air, a bubbling cry, cut short by a dreadful gurgle as the pale lips that uttered it were immersed in the inky flood. On the reed-edged bank the caravan man stood exulting and merciless, glaring with fiendish malice at the vague shape of the unhappy wretch beneath; then, callous, unpitying, he turned and sped away to where he still hoped to catch a final glimpse, perhaps a final word with Rose, on her swift homeward way.

Not thirty seconds later the tall figure of Miss Bertha Babbage entered the circle of the Chinese

lantern's influence. She wore no hat; she carried a large bag, a cross between a Gladstone and a portmanteau; and a long evening cloak enveloped her. As usual, she was smiling, and on this occasion panting a little. She had been hurrying; her mass of fair hair was a little disarranged, and through her perfect parted lips her beautiful teeth flashed. She hesitated, looked about her, put her bag down on the steps of the caravan, and approached the fire.

She started. From the darkness near by there came a piteous moaning, the sound as of a creature in distress. In the hollow of gloom, where the depths of the pond showed faintly, the reeds were agitated, something moved, large, indistinct, distressed, with bubbles and gurgles and wet, floppy gesticulations, and sounds vaguely shaping themselves into incoherent but human appeals for help.

Bertha Babbage had decision in her. She ran to the pond. "Who is it? — what is it? — are you in there?" she demanded.

The question was perhaps a little tactless. There was a pardonable touch of fresh resentment in the answer that reached her. "Of course, I'm in here. Where else do you think I am? Help me out!" said a faint voice.

"You can get out, can't you? It is n't very deep — and I don't want to spoil my dress," responded Bertha.

Out of the blackness, and through the reeds, the struggling thing began to take shape. The flicker of the fire revealed the head and torso of a man, shockingly muddy and wet, hair plastered down, coat bulging with air-bubbles imprisoned under saturated cloth. It tore at the reeds, and broke off handfuls, but Bertha's presence seemed to inspire it to effort. It persisted, floppily. With occasional slips back it gradually heaved itself upwards onto dry ground, on hands and knees, and crawled towards Bertha, who, clutching her skirts round her, retreated from it.

"Who are you?" she demanded. "And what are you doing here? Did somebody push you in?"

The thing got unsteadily to its feet, a bitter spasm of ironic humour convulsing its muddied countenance. "No, I just went in, to see if the water was wet." It grasped its unshapely huddle of garments and heaved itself convulsively. From inside and outside gouts of fluid ejected themselves onto the grass. Iffelstein's wet hands scooped off his shoulders some of the green mass of duckweed thickly plastered over him. From down one leg of his trousers something snakelike and gleaming descended, and wriggled itself hastily and noiselessly back into its native pond.

"Well," said Bertha, "you do look a sight! Had n't you better get off and have a bath?"

That last word seemed to strike home. Over the face of the wretched object before her a spasm of malice swept. "A bath!" it said, vitriol in every word. "Have a ba — Oh, don't be a silly fool! — what have I just had?"

It stooped, snatched up from the ground its hat, which had fortunately tumbled off before its owner entered the pond, and was therefore the one dry item of clothing available, clapped it indignantly on its head, gave a final hitch to its coat-collar, a heave and wrench to its trousers, and Mr. Iffelstein, invested with something of the dignity which overwhelming misfortune can lend to a sufferer, stalked away into the darkness.

Bertha felt on the whole relieved at the gentleman's exit. She went over to the fire again.

As she looked at the evidences of the simple supper, her lips widened to an amiable grin, her eyes sparkled. She glanced over the plates, the glasses. Something caught her eye near the tree-root. She stooped, picked it up, looked at it, gave a knowing and pleasant little chuckle, and hid it, whatever it was, under her cloak. She was still smiling when Bamfield returned.

"Hullo!" he said. "You're here. Hope I haven't kept you waiting."

"I'm a bit late myself," said Bertha. "I found a horrible man in the pond —"

"I know about him," said Bamfield.

Bertha raised her eyebrows. "Did you push him in?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Whatever for?"

"He annoyed me," answered Bamfield, with a touch of impatience; "but it does n't matter now."

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Bertha. She looked Bamfield over a trifle doubtfully. "I hope I shan't annoy you."

"I hope so too . . . All alone?"

"Yes. My friend could n't come. But I don't mind, if you don't. Is n't the fire jolly? You 've been having a good time, I should think," she went on, looking slyly at him. "I did n't think you went in for that sort of thing."

"Oh, a friend, you know," returned Bamfield awkwardly. Inwardly he anathematized Bertha. If only she had n't been coming — or if only he had cleared things away —

"You did n't say anything about my coming, did you ?" inquired Bertha anxiously.

"No, no," Bamfield assured her. "I did n't tell him anything — and — and of course he 's gone now."

Bertha surveyed him gravely. "Well, that 's all right. I knew you would n't give me away. But if your friend should ask you to-morrow if he'd left his hatpin here, you can give it to him." She handed it to Bamfield, a broad smile on her handsome face. "I just picked it up," she explained.

"Oh, thanks." Bamfield almost blushed.

Bertha chuckled. "I say, what a lark! Who was it? Any one I know?"

"No," very short, from Bamfield.

"I'm curious."

Bamfield pulled himself together and took matters in hand. He was n't going to be made to blush like a schoolboy in a position of this kind.

"I'm curious, too," he answered, looking at her very straight, "as to what sort of a photograph two clever people like you and me can turn out between us — providing we don't trouble our heads about anything else."

That was plain enough. Bertha took it with easy grace.

"All right. Not another word."

"Let's make a start," said Bamfield, piling the plates together. He took a handful of things toward the caravan, and there stopped. "What's this?" He indicated the bag.

"That's my bag," explained Bertha. "It's got the dress in it."

"The dress! What? Have n't you got it on? I thought you were going to change before you came."

"So I was, but my friend did n't come till nearly a quarter past nine, and I waited and waited, and I was so vexed — I thought she was n't coming at all. But at last she came, and I just snatched the

bag and ran. I did n't know whether you'd go off somewhere or go to bed if I did n't turn up to time."

"Well, it's all right." Bamfield reflected a bit. It *was* all right, of course, only there was just the possibility of awkwardness in the position of affairs. "You can pop into my caravan and change. It is n't quite dressed for company, but you won't mind."

"It's awfully good of you. You must think me a nuisance."

"Not a bit," returned Bamfield in great good-humour. "We're fighting for a great principle, you and I."

"Are we?"

"Yes. The grim and silent struggle has been raging down the ages between the girl who knows what's due to her self-respect and the — the fast thing that goes — goes" — he waved a hand in a gesture broadly indicative of fastness in things — "flaunting about in tights. Victory inclines now to one side, now to the other, and who can say — oh, who — what the end will be? But we, who champion the right, are we downhearted?"

"No!" interjected Bertha loudly.

"No!" repeated Bamfield. "Most certainly not. We bag just the right kind of frock, the frock that goes just so far and no farther —"

Bertha broke in a trifle anxiously: "Well, really,

I'm almost afraid this frock is just a little — a little, you know — you won't mind? And, of course, I could pin it over a little if you thought it too —"

"We'll see when it's on," said Bamfield. "Besides, with so much at stake, some latitude must be allowed. Now, let me put some of these things away and then you can go in." With Bertha's help in collecting, he cleared away the traces of the supper and stowed them in the caravan and brought out his stand camera and some slides. "Now, young lady —"

Bertha took off the cloak and pitched it onto the steps. She did not notice that it slipped down into the darkness beside them. Under it she wore her ordinary business attire. She went into the caravan, pulled the door to, and busied herself with changing. Bamfield arranged his camera, measured the paces between it and the caravan steps, the tree, the reeds by the pond, to assist him in focusing, and then, lighting a cigarette, waited patiently for Bertha to emerge in her finery. The caravan door opened. He looked up.

At the top of the steps, radiant, smiling, stood Bertha, and the image that leapt to the mind was that of a young lady hastily summoned from bed by a cry of, say, "Fire!" She had the dress on — as far, or nearly as far, as it could be said to be on. It ascended from her feet to somewhere in the

region of her bosom, and there it abruptly terminated. Not even a shoulder-strap was conceded. Since the ladies of the court of our great Charles the Second sat for those immortal paintings by Lely I doubt if anything more frankly confidential in the way of a frock has ever been worn by a woman of unblemished reputation. "Confidential" is indeed the word; it suggests unbosoming and this appeared to be the frock's chief function, though on closer inspection it could be seen that a half-contemptuous deference to convention was flung at the last second, as it were, to silence the critical. In fact, in its upper part it was not so much a dress as a barely sufficient opportunity for its wearer to contend that she was dressed. The point became arguable — just.

For the rest, the dress was white, intensely well-cut, close-fitting — and sufficient. As far as it went, it fitted Bertha; it clothed her magnificence of shape and at the same time called attention to it, with a cunning that was appalling. And above this frock, above the line of contention, Bertha's face, smiling, flushed, almost, for once, embarrassed, looked down appealingly at Bamfield as she confessed to a difficulty — a difficulty already suggested by the fact that she was holding the dress about her with both hands.

"Oh, Mr. Jones, excuse me, but I quite forgot one thing. Will you hook me up at the back?"

"With pleasure," answered Bamfield, tossing his cigarette away. "Come down."

"But I want my shoes on first. Will you — do you mind —" She held a pair of black shoes, high-heeled, out toward him.

Bamfield took them and stood beside the steps to put them on. She boldly drew her skirt aside and up, out of his way. Her ankles, and more, thus revealed, were as perfect as the rest of her. He put her shoes on, holding each foot in turn, and helping her to wriggle her heels in.

"Shoes and all?" he said.

"Yes — and corsets as well. The whole kit. That's why I can't stoop," she went on with enthusiasm. "It's just lovely to have a dress like this on, complete, stockings and shoes as well. You don't know how lovely it feels to have lovely things on, all the way, you know. I shan't ever have one on like it again — and it fits me. Really, you'd think it was made for me."

Bamfield finished the operation of getting the shoes on, and stepped back. Her skirts drooped decorously.

"There you are. Now what about the hooks?"

"If you would —" said Bertha, coming down the steps, still holding her meagre defence about her with both hands.

Bamfield, at the back of her, began to search for the little hooks and eyes, his gaze almost as

much taken up with the marvellous skin of her shapely shoulders. It was no easy job, but he managed it, while Bertha talked away her own embarrassment.

"It's awfully kind of you. What you must think of me I don't know. But you look so kind — and I thought, if I told you what it was for —"

Bamfield finished the task — pleasant enough, he thought — and turned her round to survey her.

"Don't you worry about that. I'm on your side. Virtue for ever — even if it wants to wear a dress" — he paused and looked her over — "that's a little, just a little —"

Bertha caught at once the suggestion of reproof. "Do you think so?" anxiously, her hands on her bosom.

"No, it's all right. Don't touch it! Stand over here and wait while I look at you." He put her by the tree and, stepping back, looked her over gravely.

He took his time. She was worth looking at. Never in all his experience while painting figure had he encountered such an embodiment of all that pertains to feminine beauty so richly, lavishly compiled as here in this girl. Arresting at all times, her beauty in this daring frock compelled attention. Her wonderful neck, large, white, matchless in shape; the gracious shoulders, sweeping superbly to her long arms; the twin triumphs of her bosom,

"IT'S AWFULLY KIND OF YOU"

firm, white, wide apart; the majestic lines of hip and thigh; the poise, careless, strong, inevitably graceful; the handsome face, glowing, happy, with large, brightly flashing eyes — only the nose perhaps a little less queenly than one could wish for; and the great plaited wreath of hair massed on her brow — all the artist in Bamfield exulted as he looked.

"What's landscape, after all?" he thought. "Jove! I'll get back to Primrose Hill and paint figure again! This girl —"

Bertha watched him closely, feeling instinctively that a criticism far keener than the ordinary had her in scrutiny.

"Will I do?" she challenged.

Back came Bamfield from his musings. "I should think so! I tell you what, we're going to make a great success of this."

"Are we?" laughed Bertha, delighted.

"Great. That poor lunatic that lost you will be looking six ways for Sunday when he sees the photograph we're going to turn out between us."

She beamed. What wit, she felt.

"You do go on!" she murmured.

"Now," said Bamfield, the artist and the business man alert in him, "stand here. You'd like a full-length, of course. Turn sideways." She turned obediently. Figure and face, Bamfield noted, were just as fine in profile. "You look fine like that.

Now, turn your head over your shoulder. Look at me — more — chin up. Good! Let me try to focus. It's difficult in this light. I'll pace it."

He paced the yards, adjusted the rack of his camera, peered into the ground-glass of the focusing-screen.

"It's impossible to focus in this light," he had to explain. "I can barely see you on the screen. I'll have to guess at it, more or less. Still, twelve feet, I think, is pretty right."

He made ready the tiny apparatus with its powder for flash-lighting, and got Bertha posed again.

"As you were just now — not so high. Your chin — more like that. That's it! Hand so." He adjusted her hand on her hip. "Look dignified. No, don't smile — more like an offended queen. Now, now, you're laughing! Mind, I'm waiting. Steady — steady!"

Whiff! The flashlight blazed and was gone.

"My goodness!" said Bertha, relaxing. "Is it all right?"

"Fine," Bamfield assured her. "Now we'll have another."

Bertha had to settle something. They were getting on splendidly, but the instinctive defences of a woman were at work and urged her to prudence. Those who, aware of man's unscrupulousness and cogitating on the wayward venturesomeness of

girls, marvel how any of them come safely through those perilous years that lie between eighteen and three-and-twenty, should recognize that circulating through the feminine mental make-up are certain vague but insistent wisdoms that, asleep though they seem, can rouse into instant action like faithful watch-dogs. One of these stirred gently even in Bertha Babbage's confident bosom. If it were worded, it would probably have run, "Don't owe money to a man." Nothing more personal than that, vague, unpointed, but a dim counsellor not to be despised.

"I say," said Bertha, "I ought to know what it's going to cost."

"Are you very anxious about the price?" rejoined Bamfield, as he took out the double dark-slide and turned it.

"Well," she said, "I know I shall have to pay you a bit extra, making you work overtime like this —"

"Quite right," he assured her, "in the ordinary way, but this is n't a bit of trade. It's my bit towards — towards winning the struggle. I like your pluck."

"Oh!" she interjected, not unpleased, for the several shillings, at least, which she knew this ought to cost were no negligible matter, while his offering to waive the charge was, she knew, a tribute to herself. "Oh, but I could n't think —"

"You shall pay me," he reassured her. "You shall sit for me. I'll take a photograph of you specially for myself — that's all. You won't mind?"

"It's awfully good of you, but — I know I am worth photoing, are n't I?"

It was impossible to help laughing. She was as ingenuous as a child displaying its new sash or its first attempt to write.

"You are," Bamfield laughed. "Now, what do you say if we have you with your foot on the caravan step?"

He led her over. She posed as he directed and again the artist in him exulted to see the fine and massive frame displayed in a fresh arrangement of grace and strength.

"Draw your dress round you."

She gathered her skirt in one hand and drew it behind her. Then she glanced down at herself.

"I say," she hesitated, "I must look a bit — a bit — shapy, don't I?"

"Yes," said Bamfield bluntly. "Don't you want to?"

She was as blunt as he. "Yes, I do. I'll show her — pooh! Her and her tights! I've got a figure, have n't I? And I know it shows in this dress, especially if I hold it round me like this. You know," she went on, dropping her voice to the proper confidential level, "you know, I've got positively nothing on underneath."

"There's not much to write home about on top, is there?" returned Bamfield amusedly.

"I know," she confessed, with another downward glance. "But if Lady Baddeley-Boulger can wear it, why can't I? Half the fashions are made by frumps for frumps. Why should n't a girl be pleased with herself?"

"Certainly," agreed Bamfield. "Don't think you've got to explain to me. You're splendid. You've length, you've strength. You're not merely graceful. Now, still — as you are." He had caught her in a magnificent pose. "Ready!"

Whiff! again, and the photograph was taken. He took nearly a dozen, altogether. The girl was full of intelligence, full of unfeigned appreciation of herself and the possibilities of picture-making she presented. She assented to Bamfield's authoritative manner, obeyed him implicitly, offered no suggestions, carried out his instructions, and Bamfield, luxuriating in the excellence of his subject, found in each pose a pleasure as keen as, perhaps keener than, Bertha's.

She grew tired, and he stopped to let her rest a minute or two.

"Mind you," he warned her, as she sat on the caravan steps, lips parted in a smile, teeth flashing, "you're a very fine young lady, but you've got to watch one thing."

"I know," she answered. "I might get fat.

Girls like me do grow fat if they're not careful. But I won't if I can help it. Still, which would you rather have me do — get too fat, like my mother used to be, or be like some girls, like a shilling rabbit?"

"Well, don't be like a shilling rabbit," chuckled Bamfield. "I should n't admire you half so much. Still, watch the other — profunditundity, voluptububulositude, I might even say." Bertha grinned at the expressiveness of the hastily-coined words. "And don't tight-lace, and don't pinch your toes. Those shoes, you know — they're too pointy at the toe."

"No, really!" she protested.

"Don't tell fibs," Bamfield reproved her sternly. "They are. You think it does n't matter, but it does. A foot's a wonderful thing, and yet most women turn them into —well, horrors. Women don't deserve to have feet."

"I say," Bertha replied primly, "you know a bit too much."

"It's my — it used to be my trade," he said. "Now, let's have the photo I'm to have for my trouble." He surveyed her consideringly. "Head and shoulders, I think. You've a splendid neck."

"Is n't it too thick?" asked Bertha, holding it with both hands. She knew it was n't.

"No, the shape's so good. Sit here." He placed her sitting on the tree-root, where the light from

the Chinese lantern, useless for photography, gave him an opportunity of focusing and of surveying her image on the camera screen. "You're fine."

She luxuriated in the praise. "I say, you do really mean that? You're not just kidding me?"

"Of course I'm not. Now, sit still." He took the photograph. "If you were an artist, you'd know what a pleasure it's been to have you posing here. I should n't talk like this to you if I thought you were as big a fool as most girls, but I believe you've got your head screwed on the right way."

His frankness, as abrupt and unstudied as her own, delighted Bertha.

"I dare say I'm clever enough," she admitted. "A girl's got to be, nowadays." She moved away and back again. "I can walk, can't I?" she enquired, still requiring praise.

"You're a delight to watch," he gave her. "You've the knack of moving. You get a pose, a paintable pose, every time, without trying, and all your lines are good. You've been a treat."

She felt she could ask no more from him. "It'll cost money soon to talk to me," she chuckled.

"Well, now," said Bamfield, getting his dark-slides together. "I'll knock off. What shall we do? Would you like a cigarette? Shall I make you some coffee? Or — what time do they put you to by-bye?"

"What's the time, please?"

"Ten past ten."

She started. "Goodness! I must fly!"

"Run in and change, and I'll walk home with you."

"If you don't mind," she said, "I won't stop to change now. I shall just run back with my things in the bag. No one will see under my cloak. Where is my cloak?" She looked around. "I thought I put it down —"

"I expect it's inside."

"Oh, yes!" She ran up the steps and into the caravan. In a minute she called out to him, "I don't see my cloak."

Bamfield approached the caravan, carrying all his photographic apparatus under his arms.

"It's there, all right," he answered her. "Look about."

A second's delay, and then Bertha again called out: "I think it must be out there."

"Wait a minute," he answered. "I expect you're standing on it. May I come in?"

He walked up the steps, pushed the door open and went into the caravan. The door swung to.

Rose walked home to the Priory in a whirl of emotions — all distressing. She felt outraged. She could not remember that she had ever been so angry as this in all her life. To be kissed, unexpectedly, caught hold of, all unaware, held by

the shoulders, her lips pressed by this man's! Intolerable, she told herself, refusing for one instant to consider the question as to whether the incident had not seemed, at the time, more startling, agitating, than outrageous. Then, his apology — no, he had not apologized; he had merely explained — offered a coarse compliment to her looks, which he had dared to put forward as his excuse. Really, he had almost seemed to suggest that she was to blame!

Yet — yet — it had all seemed so genuine — the offence in the first place, his stammering, nervous explanation, his pleading with her not to be angry. But no doubt he was adept at that sort of thing — a practised hand, skilled in the treatment of fools such as she. And then the idiotic way in which she had permitted herself to remain there, to listen to him, to be detained, as it were, in the mesh of his words — and then to be dismissed abruptly! She went hot and cold at the thought. Of course she would never see him again — that she was determined on.

She made an effort to exhibit some sort of self control as she entered the Priory, but the flush in her cheeks was still high as she went into the room where her grandmother and her aunt were sitting. It was not yet ten o'clock. They both looked up at her. They seemed to be surveying her with special and inquisitive glances. That was just her guilty conscience, she told herself.

"Where have you come from?" asked Granny pleasantly. "Have you been out? You're very late in."

"Am I?" she answered. "I just strolled across the common," and she turned to leave the room.

Neither of the others said anything more to her, and her hand was on the door, when, furiously red, she turned again to them.

"Granny," she said, "I did walk on the common, but — I went to the caravan, and had supper there with Mr. Jones."

"Supper!" said Granny. "What an idea! Whose idea was it?"

"His — mine — his, I mean — that is, Mr. Jones asked me if I'd dare to, like to, and I said I would. So I went there. He gave me some ham and some champagne, and I drank it. I did n't mean to be so late, but we got talking."

What, exactly, she had expected from the two elder women in return for this confession she could not have said, but certainly she was staggered at the calm way in which her thunderbolt was allowed to — to drop on the hearthrug, so to speak, and fizzle out quietly.

"Dear me!" said Granny, "what a venturesome thing to do! Supper, indeed! Out-of-doors at this time of night! I think, Rose, that Mr. Jones should have asked permission before he invited you."

"If Mr. Jones suggests such a thing again, Rose," said Aunt Anne, "you must tell him to see us first."

"I would n't go again," she answered.

Her cheeks were burning. She felt for an instant that she would burst out with the whole terrible tale of the outrage, but something tied her tongue. She turned and went out of the room and up to her own.

The window was wide open. She tossed her hat on the bed; she had not put it on, but had carried it in her hand from the caravan. The blind had not been drawn. She stood by the window and looked out. The night, breathless, silent; the starry skies, deeply violet; the vague landscape, spaced weirdly out, all worked in a little while their effect upon her.

At first, as she stood there, she was half frightened by the rush of strange feelings that surged through her. Something tremendous seemed to have happened — and indeed this was no delusion of hers, for, in very truth, in that brief moment of Bamfield's attack, there had burst for ever within her the dam behind which a great reservoir of unknown emotions had silently gathered since the dawn of her shy womanhood.

Shame she felt, indignation, anger — all at a pitch of intensity of which she had never dreamed herself capable. But, after these, gathering strength

each second as she stood looking out into the night, came another new and terrifying sensation that was neither shame nor anger — that seemed, in fact, to sweep all these aside as quite childish things; that brought her memory to bear on all that had passed and kept her mind lingering over just those aspects of the evening which she had determined to ignore. He had kissed her — seized her and kissed her — unfairly, unexpectedly — Here the strange, new impulse in her mind made her pause. Unexpectedly? She flushed in the dark. Somehow, she confessed, when that gay attempt at fortune-telling had flickered away, a vague warning had seemed to come to her, not of a kiss — that she could honestly say she had not dreamed of — but that a climax of some kind was bound to come. Then, she had protested — but she had lingered; and it was not merely his detaining attitude and words that had kept her there. She had wanted to stop, had wanted to go, too, but something that sprang as much from her as from him had played its part in keeping her there, listening to each word of his — listening, even at the last, for more. Then she had walked away, but supposing he had run after her? Supposing he had caught her up, had put his hand on her arm, had said, "Rose, wait!" What then?

She drew a chair to the window, put her arms on the ledge, and looked to where, just by the cor-

ner of the house, the air gave some faint reflection of Bamfield's fire. He was there, the offender, snubbed, scorned, his offering, his picture, contemned. No doubt he was sitting by the fire, properly belittled in his own mind. She had behaved so properly, her conduct had been in such correct contrast to his, that he must be feeling very much ashamed indeed, if he had any decent feeling, and this she was willing to concede him.

Why had he done it? She blushed as she recalled his excuse — "You were so beautiful." How coarse! And yet, doubtless, recognizing his mistake, he had been in too nervous a state to pick his words. And in a way, it had not been unpleasant to hear; in fact, she did not see quite how, if any excuse were possible, a better one could have been offered her.

And at that, in a flash, the strange something now guiding her thoughts whispered, "He meant it." Suddenly she became quite sure that he had meant it. She knew her beauty. Bamfield had spoken rightly — "You've looked in your glass a thousand times and known yourself lovely." Of course she had. She blushed at herself to recall it, and, recalling it, made excuses for herself — and for Bamfield.

In a flash there had come to her, not, perhaps, full knowledge, but some comprehension of what a woman's beauty means to a man like Bamfield.

All the strange exaltation of the vagabond meal — the laughter, the idle, free, wandering chatter — was explained to her. There had been a magic in the air — in the moonlight, in the firelight, in the Chinese lantern swinging on the tree, in the silence, the shadows; and right in the very core of it all had been she herself. All the charm of hour and place had received its last touch of intensity from her beauty. It had been her face, her presence, that had crowned all these influences, her voice that had set vibrating the wondrous chord of harmony that had struck into Bamfield, set him thrilling, and brought him to her, first as the man masterful, seizing her, claiming her lips without even preliminary demand, and then, as the suppliant, excusing, faltering.

She rose; she smiled in the darkness; she drew a deep breath; she felt herself transfigured. Power and the consciousness of power had come to her. The strange, interesting, wayward man, to whom she now recognized that she had been drawn with a sense of submission, had suddenly succumbed to her. In that second in which, as a brute of greater strength, he had most freely lorded it over her, her power had struck him down, and that power she now held in leash, to let slip at him again, if and when she wished.

If? She laughed to herself. When? The moon had risen by now; the night was still; the faint

reflection of his fire showed out there; romance was still there, the magic, the unknown, compelling thing that hovered round the caravan; and in herself lay the queendom of it all, to take there with her if she chose to go — now, while the moonlight baffled his eyes and the night air lapped his senses round.

And while she hesitated, her lips thrilled again, as if to the touch of his lips; she half raised her hands as if his hands again held her by the shoulders; and oblivious to the full force of the spell, joying only in her knowledge, new-sprung, of the power it gave her, and ignorant of the faintest suspicion of her own subjection to its influence, she went downstairs, passed across the lawn, opened the gate onto the common, and stole toward the caravan.

Downstairs, Granny and Aunt Anne had said little. They were too full for utterance. A tremendous thing hovered on their mental horizons, so tremendous that both felt breathless and afraid to speak too pointedly.

"She's lovely," said Granny, "and he's a nice-looking fellow."

"It's a queer life for a peer of the realm to choose," said Aunt Anne.

"Rose is just the sort of girl to enjoy a life of that sort."

"It's not my idea," said Aunt Anne, "of the

life a peer of the realm and his wife ought to lead."

The two ladies went up to their respective rooms.

Granny was too excited to go to bed. She stood by her window, wide open to the warm air. It was on the opposite side of the Priory to that in Rose's room, and she could clearly see the glow of Bamfield's fire among the trees. And of course there were the moon and the violet sky, the stars, the wistful, unreal lights and shadows, the red, misty halo round the Chinese lanterns — all operating in the still young, the eternally young, bosom of this skinny old lady. She watched; she dreamed; she smiled. All unaware, the gates of her heart swung open; the spirit of romance swept in.

At that instant, whiff! — a sudden blaze of light shot up among the trees, cutting clearly out against the blackness of the night the shape of the caravan. Whatever was it? — Momentarily she expected the appalling roar of the explosion which must follow — but all was quiet. But — but — it must mean something. It was an unearthly, blinding rush of light; it must mean — well, what could it possibly mean? She ought to enquire, she ought to know, she must know —

She looked around, found a fleecy white shawl, wrapped it around her dear old head, stole downstairs, passed across the lawn through the gate

onto the common, and stole toward Bamfield's caravan.

Rose, a hundred yards ahead, was passing across the tree-roots. She saw the despised picture leaning against the tree-trunk; she picked it up and approached the caravan. She had just missed seeing Bamfield go in, but she felt sure he was there.

"Mr. Jones," she called out shyly.

"Funny," came "Mr. Jones's" voice from inside the caravan. "It must be here."

Somebody in there with him! Rose stopped.

A voice — a woman's voice — came clear and confident: — "It can't be."

Bamfield's voice: "Do you know, I expect we're staring straight at it all the time and don't see it. Dash it all, is n't it queer —"

The woman's voice: "I can't go home without it."

"If it is n't inside, then it must be outside — that's all."

The caravan door was opening. Rose shrank behind the tree-trunk, peering around. Bamfield appeared, came down the steps, struck a match.

At that, in the dim light of the lantern that illuminated the interior of the caravan and now streamed out through the open door, appeared Bertha Babbage. To Rose she appeared as a stranger, a tall, queenly woman, bare-shouldered — not even properly — oh, yes, she was dressed,

if one might call *that* thing a dress — with burnished fair hair. She stooped forward, coming down the steps, Bamfield helping her with extended hand —

Rose could scarcely breathe. They came towards her, looking about them as they wandered about, scanning the ground. She shrank back farther.

Poor Rose, how short her empiry! A few short minutes ago she had crowned herself woman and conqueror, rejoicing in the flood of crowding emotions all touched with triumph that filled her bosom; and now, right on the scene of her first victory, a poison dart had struck her.

She had to put her hand against the tree-trunk to steady herself. What was this new, this terrible sensation? It checked her breathing, it set her heart beating rapidly, it made her knees tremble. She knew it at once — it was jealousy. She watched, and as she watched she felt suffocating. She was being robbed. She was being deceived. This man, This Man, hers, fairly won, with no conscious effort, yet beyond all question captive of her bow and spear, was being reft from her, stolen, by That Woman!

Have no fear for Rose's dignity. Even as her indignation rose hot within her all her instincts joined to silence it. Not by word or deed would she reveal her thoughts; nay, it would have been

agonizing to allow her presence to be discovered. To be secret, to be silent, to suffer and give no sign — with no conscious choice she took these for her conduct. But, oh, with what wide-open eyes she watched. Were these the sweet and friendly eyes that charmed, looking out from the face on the wall of the Primrose Hill studio?

Suddenly: "My goodness!" said the Woman. "Here's some one coming." She turned, swept her skirts about her and fled up the steps, back again into the caravan. There was guilt for you!

Rose saw Bamfield peer into the darkness, footsteps rustled there, something was coming across the grass, it drew nearer, it emerged into the firelight —

It was Mr. Gubbins again!

Mr. Gubbins's condition was lightly touched upon on the occasion of his last appearance, an hour or so previously. That condition, regarded as, from some points of view, lower in plane than the elect would commend, had now distinctly deteriorated further. Probably after reaching Watercreese Farm some further libation had appealed as permissible; possibly on his errand of benevolence to the supper-party the cargo he bore within the coffer of his ribs had not yet got fully to work. At any rate, he was now, to be plain, very drunk.

As on his earlier appearance, he bore a bundle

of clothes, but not, this time, the funeral suit. It was a bit difficult to say what it was, but shapeless as was the parcel it made, one might gather a hint of something in the nature of a fawn article, probably a waistcoat, a pair of shepherd's-plaid trousers, a black tail-coat, in short, the principal items of a man's apparelling, with nothing distinctively funereal about them.

And they were all Wringing Wet.

They looked, even in the firelight, soggy. They dripped. They stuck together damply. Mr. Gubbins carried them well away from his own person, with extended hands. Pearly drops escaped from their dangling ends.

Bamfield stood to greet him. He greeted Bamfield. He "ucked" erratically as he spoke.

"'Ullo, mester — it wash n't you, then?"

"What was n't me?"

"Shap widout — wirrout — wizzhout erry — uck — closhe?"

"Without what?"

"Erry — uck — clo — uck — closhe — you know w'at — uck — closhe is, dontcher — uck?"

"What have you got there?" asked Bamfield.

"Closhe — I gorris — uck — closhe," replied Mr. Gubbins.

"Whose clothes?"

Mr. Gubbins held his straggly bundle up, shook a few lingering drops from it. "I durro. Burri-

gorem." He surveyed Bamfield solemnly, swaying slightly as he did so. Then he offered further news, in a whisper. "Lorsh my gol' wash."

"Your what?"

"Wash — you know warra wash is, dontcher — uck? Gol' wash — gamfer's gol' wash." He grinned as if, after all, he saw a certain amount of fun in a man's losing a presumably valuable heirloom.

"How came you to lose it?"

"I durro, but I lorsht it. On a scarecrow."

"Do you mean you put your watch on a scarecrow? — What for?"

"I durro. 'Oos fault? No' mine." He asseverated this with a solemn shake of the head. "No, but Dorry'll brame me. Why're they wet, zheshe closhe?" He watched Bamfield carefully as he put the question in the manner of a cross-examining attorney. "Washer man doin' goin' about my fiel's inner dark — uck — aw wet — wring'ng wet — shopp'n' wet?"

Bamfield felt tired. "I don't know. You'd better go home, Jarge."

"Lemmerclock — uck — er night, runn'n about my fiel's wizzout 'ny closhe. Catch 'is dether col'. Serve 'im right. God my gol' wash. Brasted thief, eh? Ain't it — uck?"

"Well," Bamfield advised him soothingly, "you run after him, Jarge, and catch him."

"Catch him!" said Mr. Gubbins, with sudden vivacity. "I caught 'im one wizher shtick — uck! Robbing my scarecrow. Fine thing man can't put 'is own — uck — funeral closhe on 'is own scarecrow but anuzzer man comes along an' shteals 'em. An' my gamfer's gol' wash inner bresh pock — uck — *it*."

Bamfield saw, behind Gubbin's back, the face of Bertha appear at the caravan door. So did Rose.

"Do get him away!" whispered and signalled Bertha. "I must get home."

Bamfield spoke firmly. "Look here, Jarge, clear off, will you?"

Mr. Gubbins stiffened. "'Ooo you callin' Jarge? 'Oo're you?"

"Now, now, Jarge —"

"Zhish your common? Shtop 'ere if I like."

Bamfield glanced at the pond. No, no; this obnoxious person was the saviour of the situation an hour ago. Perish the thought. He took another course. He shook hands heartily with Mr. Gubbins. "Well, good-night, Mr. Gubbins. See you tomorrow, perhaps. I'm going to bed."

He went up the caravan steps, entered his caravan, shut the door.

"Goo' night," called out Mr. Gubbins heartily. He wandered over towards the fire. By its light he proceeded to examine what pockets he could find as he turned the bundle of clothes about.

"Wunner if 'e'sh gorrer wash? Leshee. Feel in's pock — uck — its. Pockets . . . 'Ullo! Wash thish? Wash, wash innis poggit?" He had the flat of his hand on the fawn waistcoat, and now in great haste he endeavoured to find, and succeeded at last in finding, the entrance to a pocket, into which he plunged unsteady fingers. "Ow!" — He was startled. He had withdrawn something which he dropped hastily. "Fog!" he said. "Innis pogg — prog innis fog — in frock — in prog — uck!" He gave it up. The something, whatever it was, progressed from obscurity into oblivion in three sprightly hops. "Wash thish?" He was busy again with the saturated garments. "Shea'n tickit — Bedford Park er Bon Sheet, shreet — Iffelshine — Shea'n tiggit in froggit, in prog — frog — I durro — lorsht my gol' wash!" He looked about him dismally. Perhaps with the intention of eliciting further advice from Bamfield, he stepped trippingly towards the caravan. Arrived at the steps, he pulled up short.

"'Urro! Wash zhish?" He stooped, and from behind the steps he picked up the missing evening cloak. He examined it wonderingly. Then an arch smile began to spread over his features. "La'd'sh frock!"

He stared about him.

"Were'sh er lady?" He looked at the silent caravan. "Inside, I eshpeck." He surveyed the

lighted, speechless windows with disapproval. A sense of duty took him. He went, precariously, up the steps. He smacked with the flat of his hand on the door, and gave voice to the just indignation and legitimate enquiry that moved him to investigate.

"'Oo yer gorrin there, eh?" No answer. He hammered again. "'Ere, coom out. Coom our-rofit." Still silence. He peeped through the key-hole, and apparently dissatisfied with the extent of the view, endeavoured to get a look past the red blinds over the window.

"You're a shandle, a sandle, a scanlous man! You're a —" He was back again at the keyhole. Suddenly, but quite noiselessly the right-hand window above him opened; Bamfield's head appeared, then his right arm and hand, armed with a cane, came out as well. He lifted the arm and with a vicious little singing snarl the cane smote Mr. Gubbins — where he least expected anything of the kind. Bamfield's head, arm, and cane then swiftly and noiselessly withdrew and the red blind fell into place.

Mr. Gubbins dropped the cloak and the bundle of clothes and fell down the steps with the greatest promptitude, his face convulsed with emotion which again embodied both indignation and legitimate enquiry, yet of a distinctly different quality from those previously animating it. He stared everywhere but at the caravan. He got up, and

stole stealthily round the caravan, rushed swiftly round it in reverse direction, looked underneath it —

He gave it up. It was all part of the evening's enigma: the disappearance of his watch, the man "wizzout closhe" — clearly prudence counselled retreat to familiar surroundings. Mr. Gubbins, silent now, went off home to bed.

Five seconds passed. Rose still watched from behind the tree. The door opened, and Bamfield came out, looking cautiously about. No doubt he looked for Gubbins, but his eye lit almost immediately on the cloak.

"Here we are!" he cried.

Once again Rose saw Bertha come from the caravan and down the steps. Miss Babbage, for all her size, was in a state of nerves. With the successful accomplishment of the scheme she had evolved, something of the sense of her audacity had reached her. Gubbins's visit had increased the pace of the reaction. She was in a state which could collapse into panic at a touch.

"Thank you," she said nervously. "Do you know, I'm quite shaking. Don't think me silly, but I've never done anything like this before."

"Pooh!" said Bamfield reassuringly; "it's nothing. You'll be all right."

"Let's get back. Do you think old Gubbins guessed it was me in your caravan?"

"I tell you it's all right. Gubbins had n't the least idea who you are, and no one need know anything whatever about it unless you let it out."

Bertha put her kitbag, in which she had now packed her everyday things, down on the top step.

"That's all very well," she rejoined, only half heartened, "but you don't know how people talk about here. If any one else turns up I shall — I shall run."

A footstep behind Rose. She turned. It was Granny, coming towards the caravan, her eyes fixed on the group of two. Rose stepped back farther behind the tree-trunk. Granny passed on.

Bertha had the large bag in her hand again. She turned to let Bamfield put the cloak around her, but looked back at him over her shoulder. At that instant, the white-clad, shawled form of old Mrs. Grampette stepped suddenly into the gleam of the lantern shining from the caravan's interior. Bertha gave a scream, dropped the bag, and ran. Bamfield, startled at the scream, looked round, jumped in surprise at the white, motionless figure at his elbow, turned, dropped the cloak, and dashed after Bertha.

Rose stepped out from behind the tree, put the picture down, and turned wearily away. All the life and colour had gone from her face.

There came a scream from Bertha — a shout from Bamfield. The old lady hurried up the steps of the caravan and looked eagerly after them.

"They're in the pond!" she cried to the night, as if in triumph. "Ah-ha!"

She came down the steps with marvellous agility, paused, looked around, let her eye leap swiftly from the cloak to the bag, the bag to the bundle of wet clothes, pounced on the two former, and, giggling with unfeigned delight, bore her two prizes off with her.

Rose was already entering the Priory gate.

CHAPTER XII

ANOTHER perfect day broke on the common. When the world was properly aired, the air warmed, the dew drunk from the grass by the hot sun, Bamfield stirred in the caravan, dressed, got his breakfast, shaved, and surveyed the pair of flannels he had worn the evening before. They were in a terrible state, with black, soft pond mud halfway up the thighs, together with a plaster of pond weed.

Bamfield grinned as he looked at them. If his things were like this, what state was Bertha's frock in? — her borrowed frock, that joyous creation, that airy fabric of light and loveliness, costing goodness knows how much, meant to queen it at some high social function, doomed instead to the muddy ordeal of the black-ooze-bottomed pond. Exactly what the young lady would do about it he could not well divine. He brought his thoughts back to the question of his white flannel trousers. He decided that perhaps it would be a good thing to let the mud dry on, then beat it off with a cane and send them to be cleaned. He had a vague idea that if he tried to wash the stuff off, it would only work into the fabric and never allow them to be anything better than a dingy white at the best. So he rigged up a string between the front and hind

wheels of his caravan and spread the garment out to dry. By their side he disposed Mr. Iffelstein's things. He had had little difficulty in gathering the facts that underlay the dishevelled statements made by Mr. Gubbins the night before. Just what course of conduct Iffelstein had adopted under the distressing circumstances that had undoubtedly engulfed him Bamfield could not guess. The future would no doubt disclose the secret of the past. So very fairly and good-naturedly he gave Mr. Iffelstein's clothes a swish or two in the pond, and then a chance to dry on the line.

He had completed this operation when, coming back to the caravan steps, he discovered Bertha Babbage seated on the turf close by. He stared at her, aghast. And well he might. For plainly it had been "a night out" with poor Bertha. Her hair had evidently not been arranged that morning — a wisp or two of hay stuck out of it here and there; and she still wore the dress of the previous evening. It had been just permissible the night before, but now, in broad daylight, with an intense sunlight playing over her, she presented a staggering spectacle in it. She knew it. Like Bamfield's trousers, almost to the waist it was clogged with black mud and duckweed, half dried on. Her hands were clasped on her breast in a pathetic attempt to manufacture a little more cover for herself; she was stooping, drawing her shoulders forward, all her

torso shrinking into as small a compass as it could manage, and a piteously appealing mixture of smile and blush mantled her face.

"Hullo! What's this?" gasped Bamfield.

"Don't look at me! What do I look like?" came from Bertha. "My hair — Oh, don't laugh! I have had a night!"

Bamfield, with an effort, composed the lines of his face into those of sympathetic interest.

"Poor girl! But I got you out of the pond, and took you nearly as far as your door. Whatever happened?"

"Lots of things happened," answered Bertha. "Let me sit down." She sat down on the caravan steps. "What's the time?" she asked.

Bamfield glanced at his watch. "Ten past nine."

"I shall get the sack from the post-office. Can't be helped," resignedly. "You know I made you say good-night at the end of my road. I went on to my house — it's only a hundred yards or so up the road — and then, when I went to let myself in at the front door, I suddenly remembered that I had n't got my door-key."

"Forgotten it?"

"Yes. That is, I'd brought it here with me all right, but of course it was in the pocket of my other dress, and that was in the bag, and that I'd left behind here, when we ran away."

"You ran away, you mean."

"So did you."

"I only ran after you."

"Well, anyhow, there was the key — and there was I. My landlady 's stone-deaf, so I went round to the back and tried to see if I could manage to get the scullery window open. Fancy me, in this get-up, climbing in through a scullery window at that hour of the night!"

Bamfield laughed. So did Bertha, but she went on ruefully: —

"It was bolted, and I got a bit of stick and tried to push the bolt back, when just then I heard a voice from the top window next door say, 'Goodness, Jenny, come and have a look at this!'"

"You were 'this'?"

"Yes. It was young Stangers, the coach-builder. I hate him and I hate his wife, and I was n't going to be looked at by them while I was that — this — sight. So, like a fool, I ran away again. What was I to do?"

"You could have come up here."

"Oh, I could n't. You know I could n't. Well, I had to do something, so I walked across the fields to a hay-barn in a meadow, and there I pulled down some of the hay, made a sort of bed in it, took off my wet shoes and stockings — I dare n't take off my frock, of course, but it *was* wet — and covered myself up with some of the hay."

"What fun!"

"It was n't as funny as you seem to think. I meant to wake up early and get up here, and I knew you'd let me dress."

"Oh, but wait a minute. I must tell you —"

"Let me tell you first. It's been a night! I had n't been there two minutes when a man came into the barn — a fat, lumbersome sort of man. I'm not timid, you know, but really — Well, I did begin to feel queer. But I thought it best to pretend to be asleep. He came over to me, and said — Never mind."

"Oh, what was it?"

"Never mind. It was to himself, but I heard him" — she smiled — "and then he went away. I lay still as a mouse all the time."

"Just as well you've got some nerve."

"Thinks I, 'Bertha, no sleep for you to-night, old thing.' But, bless you, I simply could n't keep awake. Off I went, and slept like a top, and when I woke it was broad daylight. So out I came — and there was the man, lying fast asleep against the door-post."

"Any one you know?"

"No; but he was a decent sort, was n't he? You know, he was just taking care of me. He'd thought I was asleep, I suppose, so he just waited there to see that nothing happened to me, and he'd tumbled asleep like I did. That was nice of him. I like him. I'd like to see him again. 'Well, here I am, none

the worse, but, oh, I do feel so undressed! You'll let me change, won't you? Where's my bag?"

"I'm sorry," said Bamfield. "It's gone."

Bertha stood thunderstruck. "Gone! You don't mean it!"

"I do," said Bamfield. "When I got back, it had vanished, and so had the cloak. Whoever it was that came collared them both. What donkeys we were to run!"

"I was n't going to be found out. The cloak gone — And look at this dress!"

She sat appalled as she considered the depressing spectacle that once glorious garment now offered. "Lady Boulger will skin me," she said, in tones of heartfelt conviction — "skin me — and serve me right! I'd do it myself to any woman who did a thing like this to a frock of this sort, if it belonged to me. My word, I'm in for it!" She sat thinking for a minute, with something like tears coming into her eyes. She forced them back. "This puts the lid on things properly, does n't it? What am I to do? You know, as a rule I don't care what people say, but — well, this get-up does look — a bit swift in daylight, does n't it?"

It did.

Bamfield reassured her. "Don't worry. I've got to get you some clothes, that's all. I'll go down and see your landlady. What's her name, and what's the number?"

"Mrs. Rogers. Number sixteen."

"All right. I can tell her, can I, just what happened?"

"Oh, yes. She knows me. She won't think anything nasty, like that beastly Stanger man and his wife."

Bamfield was looking curiously at her. "Hullo," he exclaimed, "where did you get that hat from?"

"Hat?" said Bertha wonderingly. "What hat?"

"The one you're wearing."

Bertha put her hand to her head, felt, incredulously, lifted off the hat, a fawn-coloured Trilby hat of excellent quality which till now had perched rather giddily on her hair. She stared at it in astonishment.

"I don't know," she said.

"Don't know! — don't know where you got the hat you're wearing?"

"I don't," she asseverated. "I don't know anything about it. And what's more, I don't care. What's the good of a hat? Do be quick! I say" — she glanced across the pond — "here's somebody coming! Look at me! Can I go inside?"

"In you go."

She whipped her blackened frock around her, fled up the steps, and vanished into the caravan, closing the door behind her.

Bamfield stared at the approaching figure. It was stout and bald-headed, it bulged suddenly in

a violent curve below the waist, and the top button of its trousers and the bottom button of its waistcoat were undone.

"What? Monkey again!"

Monk laid his bicycle to rest on the grass and sat down.

"Is it you, then? I am awake? Don't tell me you're part of the dream."

"No, I'm not part of a dream. What's up with you?"

"Dear lad, let me light up and tell you — tell you a lie I made up as I came along."

He pulled out his pipe, the foulest of all foul pipes, and Bamfield, squatting on the grass in front of him, listened to the following, given off in the rapt manner of a crystal-gazer: —

"You know, after I left you yesterday, I met Iffelstein and got him away. But I got the notion that now I'd tumbled across you I wanted to see a bit more of you, so last evening I biked back. I meant to sleep somewhere in Ouseton last night and get up here this morning. I was fairly late in getting to Ouseton, and then, just outside the town, I punctured. I was fiddling about with it — you know what a job it is with only a lantern and the moonlight to see by — when all of a sudden I looked up, quite by chance, and there, glimmering pale in the shimmering beams of the silvery moon, I saw — a ghost."

"This was — how long after closing-time?" Bamfield threw in the genial suggestion.

Monk, with a wave of his pipe, dismissed it in contempt.

"It glided along the road, stopped at a stile, got over —"

"Ghosts don't get over stiles. They walk through them."

"It got over, crossed the meadow, and vanished among the wistful shadows."

"No poetic attempts," interposed Bamfield. "The plain facts, if you please."

"I went over, too, and found that there was a barn there. I dodged back, got my bicycle, lifted it over the stile, and came back to the barn. There was a brilliant moon last night that lit up even the shadows inside the barn, and in the corner among some hay I saw the most wonderful thing — a glorious girl, fast asleep, in the very latest thing in evening dress. Latest! It was late — my word! Only just in time —"

"Don't be sensuous, Monkey," said Bamfield, glancing at the caravan door. It was slightly ajar.

"Of course I saw at once what it was — a case of sleep-walking. She was partly covered with hay. I knew it might be dangerous to wake her — or at least I've always understood so in these cases. Besides, even if it had n't been dangerous, she'd have been horribly startled, and I should have felt

awkward. At the same time, I could n't very well go away, and leave the girl alone, could I? I don't think I did wrong. I went in and had a look at her —"

"That will do," said Bamfield coldly. "I've outgrown the taste for stories of this kind."

"Oh, don't be a brutal beast!" Monk exploded. "I stood there and looked at her — a glorious, lovely thing, sleeping like a little child — and I felt like a knight of the middle-ages —"

"A middle-aged knight?"

"Rot away, you silly ass! I wanted to take off my cloak and lay it over that fair form, to shield it from the night dews, and then, with drawn sword, stand my lonely watch, to guard that saintly thing from harm."

"You move me deeply," said Bamfield in tones of earnest sympathy.

The upper half of the caravan door was distinctly ajar, and a nose and a bright eye could be seen peering round its edge.

Monk went on serenely, a rapt smile playing around his lips as he recalled the memories of the night before.

"I went out and sat down by the door-post — there was n't any door to the barn. I meant to keep awake, but after a time I fell asleep. I must have slept soundly, for I did n't hear a movement, and it was nearly nine when I woke — precious

stiff, too, I tell you. I looked in, and she was gone! But there was the place where she'd been lying, with the hay all tumbled. It was no dream." He stood up. "A lovely woman, a fashionable woman — I'm a fool, I know, but I'll stay in this neighbourhood till I find her, and I'll go down on my knees to her, and if a flame of pure and passionate devotion —"

A voice broke in on his ecstasy — Bertha's voice — from the caravan.

"What about my clothes, Mr. Jones?"

Monk whipped round. The top of the door was now wide open, and framed in the opening Bertha's face showed. She had knelt down, and over the lower part of the door her face beamed, rosy, smiling, thrilling with youth and high spirits. It is given but seldom to a woman to listen unsuspected to such a complete and generous acknowledgment of her personal charms. Monk lost himself for a moment. He blushed like Bertha herself. Then: "You — you — Then you were — are, I mean — I mean I am — We do —"

He turned towards Bamfield. Bamfield was already making his exit on his bicycle.

"Bammy!" cried Monk.

"I'm off on business," came Bamfield's reply, and the bicycle gathered speed.

Monk turned again towards the caravan door. The face there nodded in a friendly way.

"Good-morning," it said.

"Oh, good-morning — good-morning. It is you, then! I knew I'd see you again."

"I heard all you said to Mr. Jones," breathed Bertha.

"Jones? Ah, yes, Jones!"

"And I was n't asleep when you came into the barn. I only pretended to be. I heard what you said."

"I did n't know I said anything."

Monk began to walk up the steps. Bertha stopped him hurriedly.

"Don't, please, come up here!"

"Oh, all right," said Monk. He went right up to the caravan by the side of the steps, instead. "What did I say?"

"Something. You said it to yourself, but I heard. You were nice."

"What was it? Do tell me."

Bertha popped her head farther out over the edge of the door to look down at him. "You said, 'Lovely'!" she murmured.

"Did I?" replied Monk boldly. "Well, then, I meant it. You were — you are, you know."

"Don't be silly," said Bertha, her eyes dancing with pleasure. "I expect you're wondering what it's all about — why I was there and why I 'm here."

"Of course I'm wondering, but don't you think

I'm worrying. When I look at your face I know there's nothing that is n't quite right. Won't you come out and talk?"

"Oh, no. I feel rather awful by daylight. I've still got that frock on, you know — 'the latest.' I'm in a horrible fix, and Mr. Jones is going to get me out of it. He's a dear."

"Well, so am I," said Monk jealously. "Tell me what sort of a fix you're in, and I'll get you out of it. Bam — I mean Jones — is quite all right, of course, but he's an unbalanced sort of chap, you know, whereas I —"

"I know," broke in Bertha. "You're nice, too. You looked after me last night, did n't you? And you did me another good turn, too."

"Did I? What?"

"You woke me this morning. You — you snore a bit."

Monk started at the word "snore," took a pace or two away. "Snore!" he said. "I snore, do I? Well, upon my word —"

"What is it?" asked Bertha.

Monk, with an evident effort, restrained himself. "I'm not going to say."

"What do you mean?"

"You won't be offended?"

"Depends on what you say," said Bertha coldly.

"Well, then — Oh, I can't tell you."

Bertha looked unsmiling at him. She meant to

have an explanation. "Yes, you will. Go on. What is it?" Monk was still silent. "Do you mean to insinuate that *I* snore?"

Monk nodded.

"You story-teller! I'm sure I don't." Bertha turned crimson. Honestly, can you wonder? What young and beautiful woman could listen without indignation to an accusation of this kind?

Monk felt the necessity of placating her. "Don't let's say anything more about it," he pleaded.

"Oh, shan't we, though! How dare you! You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Monk saw that he had better produce without delay any evidence he had. "Look here, all I've got to say is that twice I was awakened by the most terrific—" The blaze in Bertha's face compelled him to desist.

"You dare say such a thing!" Her eyes flamed at him, her nostrils swelled.

The man in him was bound to respond to her challenge. "It shook the barn," he said stoutly.

Bertha groped for a possible explanation. "You're dreaming," she suggested.

"Once or twice," said Monk, "I nearly came in to see what was the matter."

"But — but —" said poor Bertha, her lip quivering at what she felt was cruelly unjust — "I don't — I'm sure I never —" Faintly she wondered if she ever.

"Well," reasoned Monk, however unwillingly, "there was n't any one else there, was there?"

"Wait a minute," said Bertha. She tapped her head. "Where did I get this hat?"

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Monk, mystified.

"There you are!" said Bertha, suddenly relieved. "It's a man's hat, and I don't know whose. But now I seem just to recollect that when I woke up I found it lying beside me on the hay, and I put it on, half asleep, without thinking —"

"That's it," Monk agreed. "Then some one, some man, stole into the barn and slept there."

"And snored horribly. Fancy taking away a girl's character like that!"

"He's a dirty dog," Monk assured her, "and something horrible will happen to him before long, you see. It's all right, then. You don't snore, and I don't snore. I'm glad, are n't you? I've known marriages absolutely wrecked —"

This was going a little too fast, thought Bertha — and at that second came an interruption. She gazed across the pond. Her brow wrinkled, her eyes dilated.

"Is n't that — oh, dear, yes, it is! Here comes a policeman."

Monk followed her gaze. "Yes, it is. What of it? He does n't want either of us, does he?"

"Yes, he does," answered Bertha tragically. "He's after me."

"After you! Good Heavens, what's he after you for?"

"It's about my clothes."

"Your clothes?"

"Yes. They're not mine. I — I — got them from some one I don't know — Don't let him come in here!" She closed the door.

Monk, considerably bewildered, attempted an air of unconcern that merely succeeded in proclaiming at a hundred yards his guilt of anything you might suspect him of. The policeman drew near and eyed him with official criticism.

"'Morning," he said, shortly and sternly.

"Good-morning, inspector," replied Monk affably.

"Any other caravan about here?" queried the policeman.

"Not as far as I know."

"H'm." The constable put his hand among his coat-tails and withdrew a notebook. This he opened, moistened a pencil-tip at his lips, and put the question to Monk in his sternest official manner: "Can you give me any information as to the whereabouts of some missing articles of female wearing apparel?"

Monk temporized. "My good man, do I look

the sort of man to know anything about female wearing apparel?"

"Well, yes, you do," came the constable's candid answer, after an impartial survey.

"Then you're no judge — and what's more, you're a silly ass!" Monk said sharply. "Anyhow, I'm not going to answer any more of your fat-headed questions."

"I'm doing my dooty, and I must make enquires."

"Are you making any sort of charge against me?" demanded Monk.

"No, sir. Lady Baddeley-Boulger, of Green Streets, has called in the aid of the force in the matter of the whereabouts of some missing articles of female wearing apparel." He read out the items: "Cloak, dress, pair of shoes, pair of stockings, pair suspenders, pair corsets, pair — the rest of the kit. Have you in your possession any or all of the aforementioned articles?"

"Search me," returned Monk.

"Lady Baddeley-Boulger makes no charge — as yet. She only wants to get the articles back. We've questioned her maid — we have n't got to the bottom of her yet, but we shall, no doubt — and from what we got out of her, we decided that we might begin by making enquiries up at this caravan."

"Well," Monk assured him, "I don't know anything about them."

"No knowledge." The constable, re-wetting his pencil, wrote ponderously in his notebook. He put the book away among the recesses of his coat-tails. "Very well — I'll just take a look round inside your caravan."

This was a facer. "Here! No, you don't! You just keep out of it!"

The constable warned him sternly. "Take my advice. Don't interfere with me in the execution of my dooty."

"Your duty —" began Monk, stepping in front of the constable and feeling like Horatius stalking forward to defend the bridge. The constable advanced stolidly.

A clash seemed inevitable, when a voice floated lightly from the caravan's interior: —

"Monkey, have you got any brown paper handy?"

"Who's that?" demanded the constable.

"A friend of mine," answered Monk.

"Who's he talking to?"

"Me."

The official brow darkened. The official eye lowered gloomily, surveying Monk with distrust and suspicion.

"What's he calling you a monkey for? I don't like this. I begin to feel there's something funny about this caravan. Perhaps this chap inside can tell me something."

"I assure you he can't."

"We'll ask him." The constable raised his voice. "Just come out of that, young feller."

"Look here," struck in Monk, "I'm not going to have this."

The knight-errant fit of the evening before was now in full blast through his breast. If he had but had a sword!

At this moment a diversion occurred. The caravan door opened, and Bertha appeared — but not the Bertha of the inadequate frock. This was another Bertha, a cool, a saucy, a quite-at-ease Bertha, dressed in the garb of a man — white flannel trousers, neatly creased, white shirt, dark-blue jacket, loose collar, flowing tie, her hair tucked well away under a hat of easy and erratic shape. Her hands were in her trousers — that is, *the* trousers pockets, and under her arm was tucked a bundle of washing — some shirts, an under-vest, and — well in the middle, had the policeman but known it — the articles he was questing for, tightly screwed up.

Bertha strolled unconcernedly down the steps. She felt that, to top the situation, she should have been lighting a cigarette and have tossed the match away artistically as she descended. But she had not been able to discover any cigarettes, and she knew she would have coughed had she attempted to smoke one. She managed without very well. Monk nearly laughed outright.

She addressed Monk. "Monkey, what about some brown paper to do up our washing in?"

Before Monk could answer, the constable put his poser. "Can you give me any information as to the whereabouts of some missing articles of female wearing apparel?" The pencil and notebook were ready for operation.

Bertha surveyed him coolly. "How should I know anything about them? All I can say is that I have n't got 'em on."

"Declared he had not got them on," noted the pencil, and the book retired again to its modest obscurity.

"Very well, young man; I'll just have a look round inside."

Bertha stepped aside; the constable mounted the steps and entered the caravan.

Bertha spoke rapidly to Monk. "Excuse me calling you 'Monkey' — but I did n't know what else your name was. I dashed into these things of Mr. Jones's. I've got the frock and things here. Can't we do them up, quick? Is there any brown paper and string about?"

Before Monk could answer, a maid in a black dress and white apron, with cap and streamers, appeared. She bore over her right arm a blue evening cloak, and in her left hand a large leather bag. She came over to Bertha and Monk and offered these articles, with the remark: —

"These things for Mr. Jones — from the Priory."

"What name?" asked Monk.

"No name. I was just to leave 'em, and say, from the Priory."

The caravan door was heard opening. Monk grasped the bag, Bertha the cloak. Monk pitched the bag toward the caravan wheel; Bertha made an effort to tuck the cloak up the front of her jacket. Too late! The lynx eye of the constable had taken in something, at least, of the incident. He came heavily, but swiftly down the steps.

"Hold on there!" A stride brought him to Bertha. He seized her by the arm, turned her round, and pulled out the cloak. "Aha! Where'd this come from, young feller?" He held it up in triumph.

"I don't know," said Bertha unconcernedly.

"Don't know! What d' ye mean, don't know? You know what's inside your jacket, don't you?"

"Don't be rude," returned Bertha simply.

"We don't know where it came from," said Monk. "Really, officer. This girl brought it. Perfect stranger to me."

"I was told to bring it," explained the maid, "from the Priory."

"Who from?"

"I was n't to say."

The constable was all excitement. "I got this," he declared, "but I ain't going to leave here till

I get the rest of the things. You two" — to Bertha and Monk — "you just wait here with me; and you" — to the maid — "you go and tell whoever it was sent you they'd better come here at once. Hop it!"

Scared out of her young wits, the domestic flitted away. At the same instant Bamfield rode up, dismounted from his bicycle, and approached the group. He bore a square suitcase in his hand. The constable again produced the notebook and pencil.

"I have to ask you," he flung excitedly at Bamfield, "if you have any knowledge of some missing female whereabouts."

Bamfield dismissed his questioning coldly. "I am not interested in such things."

"I mean," explained the constable, "I mean the whereabouts of some missing females —"

"Find the missing females," suggested Bamfield, "and you will inevitably clear up any mystery as to their whereabouts."

"I mean some missing female apparatus — apparel, I mean —"

"Why don't you say some women's clothes?" struck in Bertha impatiently. "No, he does n't."

"What about this cloak?" The constable dangled Bertha's evening cloak before Bamfield's eyes. "Any knowledge?"

The limitations of Bamfield's morality proved

too constricted for the situation and demanded a rapid extension.

"No," lied Bamfield, without a second's hesitation.

But the hound was hot on the trail, with the scent breast-high.

"I'll trouble you for that suitcase."

Bamfield stepped back, with the case behind him.

"What next? It's only some things for this — — this — gentleman." He indicated Bertha.

"I'll trouble you to let me look, all the same." The constable grabbed the case, fumbled with the catch, opened it — its contents tumbled on the grass. "Aha!" Light at last — the quarry run to earth, or, rather, pulled down in the open. "What's this?" He turned the items over. "Frock, shoes, stockings, suspenders, cor —"

"Constable," said Bamfield, "I give you my word I've never seen these things before."

"Well, if you ain't the limit!"

At the moment Monk chose to try to kick farther under the caravan the bag the maid had brought from the Priory. The movement caught the constable's eye. In a second he had pounced on that bag also, opened it, and turned out its contents. The official eye blazed with mingled joy and bewilderment.

"Hullo! Well, I'm dashed! Frock, shoes, corsets, suspenders — Any knowledge?"

"None," answered Monk. "I told you I knew nothing whatever about this bag."

Bertha, incensed at the constable's rough-and-ready handling of the bag's contents, had stepped forward, and on her in turn, and the bundle under her arm, the official eye now lit.

"That, too!" came the stern demand. The parcel was unrolled. "What? More of 'em — frock, shoes, suspenders, etsettra — And Lor' lummy! What's all this?" Bewildered, incredulous, he slowly lifted from Bamfield's extemporized clothesline the pair of ruined "whites" and the still sodden clothes bespoilt by Gubbins the night before from the fugitive Iffelstein.

The success of the chase was now positively overwhelming. The hunter, hovering distractedly over his three bundles of "articles of female wearing apparel," turned appealingly to Monk, Bertha, and Bamfield, in turn.

"Look here, young gen'lemen, what is the game? I'm asking, not merely as a policeman, but as a man."

Bamfield was haughty. "We've no information. You can make a charge if you like; we're not going to run away. Besides, you've got the things."

"Oh, yes, I've got 'em, but I've got a lot too many. Which is which, I want to know."

And now, to this little group at cross-purposes

was joined another. Old Mrs. Grampette appeared, escorted on the one side by Miss Grampette, on the other by Rose. Slowly, almost solemnly, her usual vivacious pace now resolved into a progress of great dignity, the old lady led the others on. Miss Grampette and Rose were downcast.

"Good-morning, ladies." The constable saluted. "I understand some of these things" — he indicated the various heaps of clothing disposed about the caravan — "came from the Priory. Do you know anything about them, mum?" to old Mrs. Grampette.

"No," answered the Early Victorian, stoutly.

"Do you, miss?" He turned to Miss Grampette.

"No," answered the chairman of the parish council, with a touch of indecision in her usually autocratic voice.

"Do you, miss?" to Rose.

"Yes." Rose was nervous, but truthful. It is not necessary to enquire what other members of the party felt the lash of implied reproach. "Yes," said Rose. "I sent these." She pointed to the heap near the kitbag.

"And where did you get them, may I ask?"

"Out of my aunt's room."

"Oh!" Miss Grampette gave a gasp and dropped her mother's arm.

The constable addressed Miss Grampette gravely. "I thought you did n't know anything about them?"

Anne Grampette blushed. "Perhaps that was n't strictly true," she murmured.

"And where did you get them, may I ask?"

"I got them — out of my mother's room."

It was old Mrs. Grampette's turn to look embarrassed now — but she declined. Instead, her shrivelled form stiffened perceptibly under her crinoline, and she faced the investigation now pending like a little old lioness, lifting such a look into the constable's inquisitive eye that he blinked. Still, he did his duty like a man and a constable.

"I thought you did n't know anything about them, mum?"

"That — that was — an evasive answer. I do." She brought out the "I do" with an aggressiveness that seemed to say, "By some incredible effort of stupidity you have failed to grasp the obvious facts. I now present them to you in a manner that the dullest brain cannot fail to grasp."

"May I ask where you got them?"

"I stole them." Mrs. Grampette was at her most dignified as she gave this simple statement to the assembled company.

The policeman went on: "When?"

"Last night."

Again the notebook was consulted. "Last night

— that agrees with information previously received. And where?"

"Here."

The notebook shut up. "Excuse me, mum, but Lady Baddeley-Boulger says they were in her wardrobe yesterday afternoon."

"I don't care what Lady Baddeley-Boulger says. All I know is that I found them here last night, and I took them."

"Might I ask you for a little further information, mum?"

Granny looked straight in front of her and gave off the facts in a steady stream of short, business-like sentences.

"I came here last night — just before bedtime. I wanted to speak to this gentleman." She waved a queenly hand at Bamfield, who bowed. "I saw his fire burning. There was a lady here. I don't know who she was. My word — her dress! In my young days — never mind. She ran away. So did he. They fell in the pond. They got out again. They were in a mess. Aha!" A pause while she dwelt with evident pleasure on the memory of the emergence of the two fugitives from the pond. "I found the bag and the cloak. I took them. I don't know why. I think it was the caravan or the fire — or the moonlight — perhaps the Chinese lantern. It — they — got into my blood. I had to do something — so I took them."

Anne Grampette took up the moving tale nervously: —

"My mother told me this morning, when I went into her room of her having appropriated the things, so I took them into mine before breakfast, in order to return them."

Rose's turn now. All turned to her: —

"I saw my aunt take the things out of my grandmother's room and put them into hers, before breakfast. I got them out of hers into mine, after breakfast, and a little while ago I sent them here."

Well, there were the facts — and what was an honest constable to make of them? He pushed back his helmet and scratched his head, very pardonably puzzled.

"Well, ladies — 'pon my word, it's a bit hard to know what to do."

"Why don't you take the things back?" suggested Bamfield. "You've got 'em."

"Got 'em? I should think I have. Here's a blooming rummage sale." He looked at his captures. "Hullo!" He sprang to sudden action.

However satisfied Miss Bertha Babbage may have been with the success of her hasty robing in Bamfield's clothes, the state of affairs had completely changed with the advent of the three other women from the Priory. She had grown restless during the constable's questionings. She whispered to Monk. Monk was all attention;

Bertha waited for an answer; Monk nodded; Bertha edged towards the suitcase —

The constable turned just in time to see Miss Babbage, her Sunday clothes hastily and recklessly huddled into the suitcase she clasped to her waistcoat, taking rapid leave of the caravan. Where exactly Bertha meant to go she had not decided, but away from there was the first intention.

Like a hound at his quarry — a rather ponderous and slow-moving hound — the constable leapt. "Hi! Stop! Here! Come back, young feller!" Bertha broke into a run.

Monk was ready. As the constable blundered past, Monk's fat hand descended broadly on the officer's helmet. Obedient to the impulse, the official casque suddenly descended over its wearer's eyes and nose. Blinded, he spun round three times, hands extended, grasping vainly.

"Run!" shouted Monk, and ran himself. Bertha's classic limbs were already fast bearing her away among the gorse. Fatly but stoutheartedly, Monk followed. With a painful effort the constable withdrew his visage from the unyielding helmet. He danced after the fugitives, pulled up short, looked at Bamfield, came back, again started in the chase — stopped again, looked as helpless as he felt, raised his voice.

"Stop 'em!" — there was no one to stop 'em.

"'Ere, you!" to Bamfield, extending a white cotton-gloved hand in warning. "Don't you attempt to go away." Three more steps in the direction where the fugitives, now side by side, were making good time, then another pause. "I shall want you." A gleam of inspiration. "Arrest him, ladies."

"Nonsense, officer," said Anne Grampette. "This is Lord Bamfylde."

The officer winced, but bore the impact bravely. "Can't help that," he said sturdily. "Keep his lordship for me." Lightly, sprightly, the zest of the chase again speeding his limbs, he set off. Run, Bertha; run, Monk! For here comes Duty, eager, once baulked, fresh fired . . .

Rose stood wondering. She had heard what her aunt said. She could not understand. Had she mistaken? More was to follow in the same strain.

Majestically her grandmother swam in Bamfield's direction. "Really, Lord Bamfylde, I apologize for the officer, but—if you will persist in going about in this bohemian fashion—" She looked arch.

Rose felt a singing in her ears. A number of things seemed to be explaining themselves.

Lord Bamfylde! She looked from Bamfield to her grandmother, to Aunt Anne, back to Bamfield. "What does my grandmother mean, Mr. Jones?"

Very, very complacently Aunt Anne gave her the Wondrous Fact.

"This gentleman is Lord Bamfylde, Rose."

Aunt Anne smiled, Granny smiled, Bamfield looked steadily at Rose. No question of her surprise. Her eyes opened wide — she turned rather white, he thought. She carried a little bag on her wrist, and at this she now fingered, her head drooping. She came over to him, extended her hand. He offered his. Two half-crowns dropped into his palm.

"There's your five shillings," said Rose. "I don't want the photographs. Good-morning. Come, Granny."

Bamfield's knees for a moment almost shook. He was dizzy. If Rose had planned her stroke for effect — instead of being merely a nervous girl anxious to be rid of a miserable business — she could not have staggered him more effectively.

"But — but —" stammered Bamfield.

"Now, Rose!" said Granny.

"Rose!" — expostulatory — came from Aunt Anne.

Bamfield, red as fire, found something of speech.

"Do you mean this? Are you really going to treat me like this?"

Rose, trembling, flashed at him from under levelled brows. "Remember last night," she said icily.

Bamfield's nerve was steadying. "What? Just because for one moment I lost myself? Oh, come! I asked your pardon."

"You did," she answered bitterly. "And you told me you did n't care a snap of the fingers for any other woman."

"I know I did."

"You would n't turn your head, you said, to look at any one else."

"And that's true." He stepped towards her as he spoke, and the words came hotly. Love's a queer thing. He loved her passionately at that moment — and felt that he could take her and shake her.

Rose's feelings were rapidly overpowering her. Tears were not far away.

"Oh, how can you? I may tell you that I came back again last night — and I saw — you know what I saw," turning disdainfully to Bamfield.

"What did you see?" he demanded.

"I saw you — bring — a girl — out of your caravan. I could n't see who she was, but I heard what she said."

"What did she say?"

"I'm ashamed to repeat it — Oh, very well, then! — that she was glad no one could see her, and you said it would be all right — no one had, and if she kept quiet, no one would know."

Bamfield's mind jumped back hastily to that

minute of Bertha's departure, flashed over the incident, and saw light.

"Oh!" he almost laughed, "I can explain that."

"I dare say, but please don't," said Rose, miserably indignant. "I'm ashamed, I'm degraded enough as it is. How can you! I thought you were so different. If you were just a common man, as you pretend, it would be bad enough, but for a man in your position to go about as you do, just to pick up adventures, I suppose, with — with fools like — like me — and that other girl, I dare say — it's despicable!"

Poor girl. The tears were plain to see.

Mrs. Grampette intervened. "Rose, come! You must make allowances for a man in his lordship's position."

Rose flashed out: "I don't care about his position. I think it only makes his conduct worse. I meant to forgive you" — she addressed Bamfield again — "because — because — well, I could n't think badly of you. But I thought you were only a photographer."

"And supposing I'm not?" He felt his heart glowing, and moved a little towards her. She gave no ground, but faced him, hostile, relentless. "Miss Rose, let me explain."

"Let his lordship speak, Rose," put in Granny, a trifle anxious. Rose was making herself a very stupid girl.

"I don't want to speak to you at all," said Rose, unhappy, but never flinching.

He was peremptory. "You must. Come, Rose; let me speak to you. I beg it. Tell me something, and I'll tell you something. Why did you come back to the caravan last night?"

She went crimson. Her voice was unsteady as she answered. "I expect you know."

"I'll give a guess," said Bamfield. All was well, he felt. "And I was just Jones the photographer? Yes? And you don't like the idea of my being Lord Bamfylde?"

For the first time she dropped her eyes and spoke to the ground. "I — I liked you when you were Mr. Jones."

He laughed outright. "Well, then, you've got to listen to me. Yes" — as she lifted a shoulder — "I insist."

"That's the way, my lord," said Granny. "Rose needs a master."

She beamed on the two. Rose held her head high, stubbornness personified, staring past him.

"Thank you, Mrs. Grampette. You'll listen, too, I hope, and you, too, Miss Grampette." There was n't a doubt of that — both the older ladies were all ears. Rose's attitude expressed nothing but high disdain. Bamfield felt that the supreme moment of his life had come. "Listen, Rose — I'm not Lord Bamfylde."

All three ladies started. Rose condescended at last to look at him; Mrs. Grampette and Aunt Anne turned hot — and cold. They stared at one another. Aunt Anne's mouth opened, but no voice came through its grim portals.

Granny found her tongue. "But — bu — bu — my daughter Emma, at Brighton, says you are."

"Your daughter Emma, at Brighton, is entirely mistaken," Bamfield assured her gravely. He was looking at Rose, who was staring at him, her breath coming rapidly.

Aunt Anne was ready now. "But you as good as admitted to me, yesterday afternoon, that your name was Bamfylde — and I thought you must be Lord Bamfylde." She glared at him; she grasped her walking-stick tightly — so tightly that Bamfield kept half a wary eye on it. Aunt Anne most plainly had a temper, and there was no knowing — "Why — and you knew I thought so! You deliberately let me think so!"

Bamfield admitted it cheerfully. "I really did n't care what you thought, so long as I got a chance of speaking to Miss Rose."

Aunt Anne let herself go. The man's insolence was unblushing and avowed. "But this is abominable! You mean to say you came to the Priory under the assumed name of Jones — when it was your real name all the time — or something just as bad — Smith, I should n't wonder" — Bamfield

"I—I LIKED YOU WHEN YOU WERE MR. JONES"

should have withered, but missed his cue and stood there alive and whole — "and photoed our Early Norman architecture!"

Granny took up the moving tale. "I shall write," she announced impressively, "I shall write to my daughter Emma, at Brighton, this very day and tell her all about you, you deceitful man — and your unblushing profligacy — that woman — last night — and your wretched camera — Tcha! I'm glad you both fell in the pond! Aha!"

Anne took charge in brisk and businesslike style. "We'd better put an end to this at once. Rose, get off home. And you — I've warned you before — move your caravan off our common!"

The angel with the flaming sword could not have seen Adam and Eve off the premises at Eden with more determination than did Aunt Anne pronounce the parting between Rose and Bamfield. Bamfield, delighted with his mastery of the whole situation, as developed so far and still to unfold, could afford, he felt, to be politeness itself.

"Won't you let me explain?" he asked.

"I will not. What your game is I don't know, but one can suppose —" She paused. At the moment she did not suppose anything very clearly.

"Can suppose?" hinted Bamfield.

"That you had the very worst of motives. Money, I have no doubt, was what you were after."

The shaft glanced from Bamfield's marble front, but Rose broke in indignantly: "Aunt Anne, that's not fair! It was our fault."

Aunt Anne was lofty. "Hold your tongue, miss! You've helped to fool us — philandering about in this man's caravan at all hours —"

"I've done nothing wrong!" Rose expostulated.

Anne surveyed her coldly and cruelly. "I suppose we must take your word for that."

Bamfield flushed darkly; Rose turned white; even Granny had to remonstrate.

"Anne!"

Anne refused to retreat, though she had the grace to avoid Bamfield's glance as Rose clasped her hands before her breast.

"Oh, don't let's be finicking! She's her mother over again!"

That hit Rose where to pain her was easiest. She spoke with trembling lips: "Let my mother alone!"

All the intensity of loyalty in her nature surged up in the protest. Bamfield caught its accent and longed to kiss her hands for it. Granny endeavoured to put an end to the scene.

"Come home, Rose," she said, holding out her hand.

Rose ignored it. "I'm going to speak to Mr. Jones first," she said steadily. It was flat rebellion, she knew, but from the moment Aunt Anne had

attacked Bamfield so outrageously, her mind had been made up. She *was* a rebel.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," said Granny sternly.

"I will. I'm not a child, Granny. I must—I will!"

But Granny was inexorable. "You can speak to him when he comes out of prison."

Bamfield burst into laughter, Rose winced, Granny bridled, Aunt Anne gripped her stick. Bamfield, feeling the moment for complete, and, he felt, triumphant, explanation had arrived, sought momentarily for the right words for an effective opening— an exasperating delay promptly forestalled him.

Pumped — that is the elegantly descriptive word — as never surely were man and woman pumped before, Bertha Babbage and Monk staggered in among the group, burst through it, stumbled up the steps of the caravan; Bertha entered, Monk followed, bearing bravely the suitcase that Bertha had carried when first their race with the Law commenced; and the two halves of the door slammed to.

Equally pumped, speechless, perspiring, gasping, the Law followed, ten paces behind. It reached the caravan, swayed, recovered, toiled up the steps, leant heavily against the door. The door held tight. The constable sat down on the narrow front platform, and panted, and panted, and panted —

The little window to the right of the door opened. Monk thrust his head out, and panted, and panted, and panted.

The constable heard that laboured breathing. He turned a blurred eye upwards, saw his quarry, escaped, yet held. Faintly he beckoned to Bamfield.

"My lord," he said, "give us a hand."

Aunt Anne's voice at its very harshest disclosed the new state of affairs. "Lord Bamfylde!" she snorted, contemptuously. "He's not a lord — he's a rank impostor. Constable, lock him up!"

"Certainly, Miss Grampette, but I dunno' 'ow, just now. I've got my hands full. My lord, or young feller, or whatever you are, just you wait here. 'Ullo, 'ere's 'elp!"

The constable might call it 'elp, this strange thing that now came forward from among the trees, but at first glance its outward appearance suggested more the need than the loan of assistance.

It was a little man, with a large nose and an Oriental aspect of face. It was fantastically dressed in a suit of clothes from which all colour was so conspicuously absent that you surmised at once a suit of mourning. This suit was miles too large for it. The trousers crinkled down in most ungracious creases over its boots, its coat hung in elephantine folds about its diminutive torso, and on its head a top-hat, draped with a voluminous scarf of crape, rested firmly down on its ears and eyebrows. A

grin lit up Bamfield's face, and from the caravan came a joyous gasp from Monk.

"God bless my soul! It's old Iffy! Hullo, Iffy!"

Mr. Iffelstein shambled forward. He moved with caution. In addition to the outrageous want of fit in his clothes was the fact that he had no braces. Even Gubbins had had sense enough the previous night to remove the braces from the suit he had decorated his scarecrow with.

He halted near Bamfield. "Good-morning," he said.

Bamfield endeavoured to compose his features. "Still alive, then?" he answered politely.

Iffelstein drew a deep breath. "You nearly finished me last night."

This sounded promising. The policeman got on his feet, felt in the recesses of his coat-tails for his notebook. "You know this man, sir?"

Iffelstein turned to survey his questioner. "Know him! Have n't I been chasing after him for the last six months? And last night, when I got him, he tried to drown me."

A thrill ran through all, or nearly all, there.

Granny spoke to Iffelstein. The old lady was still vicious. "Oh, you're after him, are you? Is he known to you as Lord Bamfylde?"

"Certainly not," said Iffelstein, puzzled.

"Is his name Jones?" asked Aunt Anne.

"Certainly not, madam."

"But you've got him now," said Granny. "Has he done anything?"

"Yes, madam — but nothing to what we expect him to do before he dies."

All eyes were on Bamfield.

Something moved Rose to lean towards him. "What have you done?" she asked in a low voice.

"Nothing," Bamfield assured her lightly, but impatiently. He wanted this lot of fools out of the way. There was Rose, his Rose he told himself, and all that was necessary now was the chance to speak a dozen words.

"I can't have any talking to this man Jones," declared the constable.

"I'm not Jones," declared Bamfield, his temper beginning to rise.

"Why," said Granny, "you just said you were."

"It's merely a name I go by."

"Ah!" (The constable, notebook open.) "*Alias* Jones, eh?"

"No, you fathead."

"What is your name, then?" The question came simultaneously from (1) Mrs. Grampette, (2) Aunt Anne, (3) the constable.

"Bamfield."

"But you just said it was n't," expostulated Mrs. Grampette.

Aunt Anne gave an unpleasant little laugh. "I don't believe he knows what his name is."

Bamfield made one more tremendous effort to control the situation. "Kindly allow me to explain."

The constable snapped his book away. "You explain to the magistrate. 'Ere, come along."

"What, leaving us so soon?" asked Monk derisively from the window.

"I'll get 'elp." From among the constable's breast-buttons his white cotton gloves extracted a whistle, and the next instant a piercing shrilling began to startle the yellowhammers in the gorse.

At its second shriek another head appeared, leaning out of the other caravan window, a lady's head . . .

"Stop that noise," it commanded.

All stared. Iffelstein was the first to speak. "Excuse me, young lady, but have you got my hat?"

Bertha stared at him. "I don't know you."

"You don't know this lady, Iffelstein," said Bamfield.

"Don't I? Seeing we slept together last night—"

"Oh!" ejaculated Bertha — and can you blame her?

"Don't misunderstand me, miss, but we slept in the barn together —"

She divined the truth. She leant a little farther out of the window, and addressed herself to Monk. "The man that snored!" she said.

"That's the beggar," rejoined Monk.

Plainly there was matter here for relation. Bamfield felt they might as well have it. The atmosphere was turgid, unsettled — give it time to fine down.

"What's all this about, Iffelstein?" he asked.

And Mr. Iffelstein told them, in a voice of gentle melancholy.

He was an expressive speaker, given to gesture. Bear in mind his hat, his trousers (unbraced), and the fact that the sleeves of the coat he wore came well down beyond his finger-tips, and you may enjoy something of the humour the others found not only in the matter but the manner of his story-telling.

"You see, when I left here last night I lost my way, and then I saw a gentleman standing in a field looking at the moon. So I went up to him and I said" — Here, unconsciously mimetic, he took off his streamered top-hat in an explanatory gesture — "'Can you tell me the way to Ouseton?' And when he did n't answer I saw he was a scarecrow. So I said" — again a wave of the top-hat — "'I beg your pardon. I thought you were a man.'"

Bamfield, choking, looked at Rose. Alas! all this was savourless to her. Her eyes fixed mournfully on Bamfield, she heard nothing of Iffelstein.

"And then," went on that gentleman, "I saw he had on this suit." He extended his arms suddenly. Immediately — fortunately beneath his

coat — his trousers commenced a rapid descent towards his boots. He stopped them with a convulsive grab, hitched them up, and proceeded, with more of restraint in his illustrative gesticulation.

"You can laugh" — most unmannerly, they were laughing — "but at any rate it was dry — and that was something. So I undressed, and then a man came running at me, with a stick, when I'd got nothing on but my boots and socks — and my hat."

"Did you explain?" asked Granny.

"I was going to, madam, but he had a stick, so I just grabbed up the things I'd got off the scarecrow, and ran. He struck me," said Mr. Iffelstein, a tremor at the recollection in his voice, "severely. I cannot get to see the place, but I know there's a shocking bruise."

The constable began to lick his lips. Why had n't he taken all this down? He got his notebook out again.

"Well, I got away, but I left my own clothes behind, with my money in. What was I to do? Well, I found a barn full of hay, and I went in, and tucked myself up in the darkest corner, and then this young lady came in" — he waved a coat-cuff at Bertha, who looked at Monk.

"Why did n't you come out?" asked Mrs. Grampette.

"I could n't."

"Why not?"

"I had n't got any clothes on," explained Iffelstein with simplicity and evident truth. "I did n't want to put this suit on while I was all wet, and I was warm enough in the hay, so I hung the clothes up beside me in the dark, and the young lady took off her shoes and stockings, and she lay down; and then you came in" — he waved his other coat-cuff at Monk.

"I did n't see you," said Monk.

"I did n't want anybody to see me. Well, I fell asleep, and when I woke the barn was empty. My things were there all right, except my own hat and I thought if that had dropped down in the night it might have rolled somewhere near the young lady, and she might have taken it away —"

"I suppose I did," interrupted Bertha. "I was n't awake properly when I got up."

"Can I have it miss?" asked Iffelstein anxiously.

Bertha looked at him viciously. "Can you have it? Just you wait a minute." Both the heads withdrew from the caravan windows, the door opened, and Monk and Bertha came rapidly down the steps. Bertha looked well in her best coat and skirt.

"Hullo!" said the constable in amazement, "where did you spring from?"

"Do you mean to tell me," said Mrs. Grampette, scandalized, "that you've been undressing

and dressing again in that caravan — with that man there?"

Monk laid his hand to his heart. "I call all here to witness," he said, "that I've stood with my head out of the window all the while."

Bertha looked at Granny as much as to say, "There you've got your answer," and faced Iffelstein darkly. "So you're the man, are you? Take your old hat, you nasty, noisy thing!" She threw it at him. He picked it up.

Monk stalked threateningly over to the little man. "Who the deuce do you think you are, going about snoring and snorting all over the first barn you come across as if you owned the earth!"

Bertha's indignation when first Monk brought forward the suggestion that she was capable of anything so indecorous as sleeping audibly was nothing to Iffelstein's. A tempest of wrath, incredulity, disdain, swept across his face. "SNORE!" he thundered, in a temendous voice. "SNORE! Me — SNORE!" — Monk simply dared not repeat the accusation.

The constable brought everything back onto business lines. He was busy with his notebook and pencil. "Well, sir," he asked Iffelstein, "what's the charge?"

"Charge? — What d' you mean, charge?"

"Ain't you charging any one with anything, sir?"

"Me? Certainly not."

The constable felt faint. A moment ago visions of Important Cases, more than one, had seemed such certainties. He had heard voices inside his helmet. "In sentencing the prisoner to seven years' penal servitude, the Judge said he felt it no more than his duty to draw the attention of the proper authorities to the admirable and highly intelligent way in which the difficult matter of the arrest of the criminal had been carried out by Police Con—" . . .

He jerked himself back to present life and its affairs. Looking round him: "What, ain't no one going to charge nobody with nothing?"

He gave them ample time, letting his glance travel slowly over the group as searchingly as an auctioneer surveys a crowd of slow bidders, seeking to elicit, to draw, to extract, to induce — Useless. All remained silent. More, they looked him over coldly, hostilely. He felt he had no single friend there. Sadly, slowly, with hand that trembled, he put his notebook in its place of concealment.

"Can any one tell me," he appealed, "what I'm going to do?"

"Certainly." Bamfield spoke cheerfully and decidedly. "Officer, these are the 'Missing Female Wearing Apparel.' Take the lot down to Lady Boulger's and return them, and take every-

body here who had a hand in removing them from her lawful custody."

"Oh, no!" said Bertha, shrinking. "I don't want to see Lady Boulger."

"Nonsense, Bertha," said Monk, "let's face it. 'Hand in hand together, love.' Come along, officer; come on, ladies."

"I'm not going," said Mrs. Grampette, with a touch of timidity.

"You'd better, madam," advised Bamfield. "It's always better to get these things explained and done with."

"Well, I shan't," said Aunt Anne.

"Perhaps you had better not," said Bamfield, "since you admit receiving the purloined property."

Aunt Anne prepared to go immediately.

"What about you?" queried the constable.

Bamfield went to his loftiest. "I am prepared to allow the whole case to drop, as far as I am concerned." He managed to convey the idea that he was conceding a good deal in very handsome fashion.

"You, miss?" The constable turned to Rose.

"This lady," struck in Bamfield hastily, "who only returned the Missing Apparel, has no intention of laying claim to any reward."

"You sir?" This time to Iffelstein.

"Nothing to do with me," said Mr. Iffelstein.

"I see my clothes here, and I'm going to stay and put 'em on."

"No, you're not," broke in Bamfield. "I won't have you here. Take him along, officer."

Once again the constable's spirits soared. "Certainly, sir. What's the charge?"

Bamfield considered. "I leave it to you, constable."

Iffelstein suddenly turned nasty. "Well, what's the charge? You want to get rid of me, but I'm not going. I've been disgracefully treated. I've been shoved into that beastly pond, and left to wallop about in the dark; I've been chased about the fields with nothing on, and struck with a stick; I've had to sleep in a barn all night and got a chill on my lungs; and I've lost my purse and my season ticket. And now you talk about charging me — me, mind you! I'd like to see some one charge me."

He held the cards. He towered high — and toppled.

"Hold 'im!" said a loud voice. Mr. Gubbins shot out from the trees. "That's 'im." He reached the group. "So, you're the brasted thief that coom and robbed my scarecrow, are ye? W'eer 's my gold watch — eh? my gamfer's gold watch?"

He plunged at Iffelstein, who backed round the constable. Gubbins nipped round the other way and caught him; Iffelstein wrestled and resisted,

but Gubbins held him firm, swung him over his knee, and plunging his hand at him pulled from out of the breast pocket of the coat a watch the size of a man's fist and a ropey chain.

Iffelstein burst into tears. "I don't know anything about it. I did n't know it was there. Officer —"

The constable felt on firm ground at last. "You charge him, Jarge Gubbins?"

"Charge 'im? — 'Course I charge 'im."

"Then, come on!" Iffelstein felt the policeman's hand descend on him, felt himself lost, and prepared to obey orders. The constable motioned to his flock. "Go ahead, Jarge Gubbins. I 'ave the prisoner. Ladies, this way. You, sir? — you're a-coming?"

"Certainly," said Monk promptly.

"Then might I arst you to be so good as to carry the Missing Female Wearing Apparel, sir?"

"With pleasure, officer." Monk grabbed the bedraggled bundle.

Bertha turned her head from it as if the sight of it brought her qualms unbearable; the group began to resolve itself into a straggling line, at the head of which marched Mr. Jarge Gubbins.

Granny turned to Rose. "Rose, go straight home, and have nothing to say to this man Jones."

"No, Granny," Rose answered.

Anne Grampette took her mother's arm. She

caught Bamfield's eye. "Shall I tell you," she asked acidly, "what I think of you?"

He gave her his politest. "Don't. I'm conceited enough already."

She opened her mouth, shut it again, and escorted Granny after the others.

"Now, Rose," said Bamfield.

She was walking slowly away, but at his voice she stopped, looked at him, then looked away again. It was hard to begin, and all this confusion made it harder. Still, she would do it.

"I want to tell you," she said at last, in a low voice. "I'm an impostor, too."

"An impostor! Whatever do you mean?"

She raised her eyes to his. "I've told you I came back last night. I must tell you why. After I got home, I felt so strange. I was angry, I could n't bear to think of you, yet I did, and after a time I was n't angry any more. I wondered what had happened to me — to us both — and then I saw it was the night — and the caravan — and the fire — and being together — and —"

"Yes?"

"Well, that — all those things — had made you want me. Was n't it so?"

"Those things — yes; and something else," said Bamfield softly.

"And suddenly I wanted you." She got it out, with burning cheeks.

"Did you, you darling?"

"Don't! Somehow, talking as we did — as you did — perhaps speaking of the old studio of Primrose Hill, all the old life seemed to come back. I thought of my father, and men friends of his that used to come in sometimes to see him — mostly old, but somehow you seemed to be one of them. And you were going away soon, of course, and — and —"

"What was it, dear?"

"I felt suddenly as if you were a ship sailing away and leaving me all alone on an island, and I could n't bear it, and so I came back again without any one knowing. I wanted to speak to you again."

"You wanted me?"

"Yes. Ah, but wait!" as he took a sudden step towards her, his hands outstretched. She put her hand out to keep him back; he caught it and held it, but she kept him at arm's length. "Wait — let me tell you why. I thought, 'There's magic in the air. He's under the spell — he's not sure of himself. It's the night and the strangeness that move him, give me power over him — and if I go to him now —' Oh, can't you see? I was just a common woman, playing a common woman's trick — trying to catch a man!"

She passed her free hand over her shamed face, then looked at him more boldly, as if, with her

pitiful little confession, she had found fresh courage. Bamfield was too absorbed with the beauty of her to speak. He could only stare.

"Now you know. I felt at first I could n't tell you, but when Aunt Anne attacked you so, I felt I could never hold up my head again if I did n't confess how mean, how low I was, too."

That frank "too" was priceless.

"Do you know how happy you are making me?" asked Bamfield. He tried to take her other hand. She refused it and withdrew the one he already held.

"Listen to me," she said solemnly. "I've been thinking lots of things about you since last night. I hardly slept. This is n't the life for you, unless you bring something into it to make it fine. You can't, you must n't be content with it. I'm certain you could do things. One feels it. Every one feels it who talks to you. Why don't you?"

"What shall I do?" asked Bamfield.

"Why don't you study painting? That's a great thing. Great men do it. It's a fine work — and I've been thinking about the picture you showed me last night. I'm really a stupid girl. I can't paint, although I've tried a little, and I can't judge properly, but I believe that there's more in that picture than I understand. I saw it in my dream last night, and I seemed to see it more really with my sleep eyes than my waking eyes, and it was

wonderful. I believe you might be a painter — perhaps a great painter."

"And make money?"

("Why the devil do I keep on testing her?" he asked himself, and knew that it was only for the joy of the unending fineness that always responded.)

She drew a sigh. "Oh — yes — if you wanted to so very much. But just think!" She took a step towards him and laid her hand on his arm. "Supposing you were content not to make a lot of money, but just went wandering about in your caravan, moving from one beautiful place to another, painting as you went — perhaps becoming a great painter — with loveliness all about you? Can't you see how rare, how full of happiness your life might be?"

"I suppose it would," said Bamfield. Should he tell her outright, or should he roll the morsel under his tongue a little longer?

"Then do it!" said Rose. "Do! The money does n't matter. I know. I remember how happy my father and I were in the old days, and sometimes there was no money at all. You heard what Aunt Anne said just now — that money was what you were after? I don't believe it of you. But you ought not to be so poor. You need n't be. Why don't you try?"

Bamfield could hold it back no longer. "Very

well, then," he answered in as dry and business-like a fashion as he could manage. "But what about you if I do?"

"What about me?"

"Are you going to marry me?"

She drew a sudden, sharp little breath and stood looking at him without answer; she had no words.

"Oh, yes," went on Bamfield, with a touch of cynical scorn. "I'm to take your advice, throw up my lucrative photographic connection; I'm to start a new career; I'm to run all the risk, in fact — while you sit safely by and watch. If I fail, you look the other way, wash your hands of the whole business; if I win, you just come and say, 'I told you so,' I suppose you think that fair?"

She tried to speak, but even now, under this attack, she could find in herself nothing but protest at his unfairness.

"Now, come," said Bamfield, with a "positively-the-last-offer" air. "Either you're giving me a piece of advice that costs you nothing — which is what anybody can do — or you mean what you say. If you do — if you mean that you really think I shall make a painter — prove it. Marry me. Marry me — and I'll paint!"

Rose found her voice. "But do you mean it?" she asked. "I mean, do you want me? Do you — care for me? I'm not afraid — but it must be

something more than that. Oh, tell me, do you care for me — want me?"

He caught both her hands this time. She let him. He pulled her close to him; his eyes caught and held hers, and she saw the smile go out of his face, and the look she had seen the night before, when he had kissed her, come over it. His voice, too, was different; nothing of banter in it now, but an earnestness that went with the steady, compelling power of his eyes and the grip of his hands about hers.

"On my soul, I do!" he said, and she knew it was true, past all doubting. "There's nobody else but you in all the world. And, listen, you wonderful thing, while I tell you something. You want me to paint. Well, I do paint. I'm an artist, a painter — some people say I'm a great painter. Perhaps it's true, but if it is n't, by God, it's going to be one day! And all you want me to do — why, my dear, I do it now. The wonderful life you urge me to — it's mine already. I do wander about in this caravan from place to place; I do seek for beauty and loveliness and paint it as I go, not for money, but for the joy of it. It's the very life of me now. And you shall come with me and share it —"

Their lips were almost touching. He had drawn her closer as he spoke, and she had let herself yield to the impulse.

"Am I really to marry you?" she breathed, rapt.

"If you will. Will you?"

She gave him no answer except what her eyes spoke, and on that he stooped and kissed her lip. He lifted his head. She still looked up at him, and before he could let his lips fall again on hers, she said shyly:—

"Then — do you mind telling me your name?"

He burst out laughing. "Bamfield — not Lord Bamfylde, but John Martin Bamfield. And listen, Rose. There's not only the caravan. That's for the summer. In the winter we're going to live in my studio at Primrose Hill, a big barn of a place, with whitewashed walls" — her eyes began to widen, her lips to part in the dawn of a fresh wonder — "and on the wall is a painting, a sketch in oils of a girl's head, with long brown hair tumbling over her eyes, and she smiles at you through her hair —"

Tears were in Rose's eyes. "Oh!" she trembled. "Don't play with me! Is it — is it really true?"

"Yes, true."

"It's magic," she said. "Everything's turned magical."

"Of course it has," he answered. "And we've found out how to see the magic. It's been my studio for nearly six years, and the girl whose picture is on the wall has been my little unknown sweetheart all the time. And now I've found her, living and lovely."

He kissed her again, and in her lips, as they met his, was a passion of happiness and gratitude for this crowning miracle of the studio.

"And now," said he, "I'm going to tell you about that girl last night in the caravan. And you're going to laugh — and so will she. She's a first-rate sort —"

Rose suddenly freed herself. He turned. Unheard, a motor-car had been run across the common, and from it a tallish, white-haired gentleman had descended and was approaching them. He had a cane in one hand and over his arm hung Lady Boulger's frock . . . It looked worse than ever.

Bamfield let Rose go, and stood a pace forward to receive whatever was coming. The old gentleman came up to him.

"Are you the owner of this caravan, may I ask?" he said stiffly.

"I am," answered Bamfield.

"Then you are the perpetrator of the — the outrage — this outrage on one of my wife's dresses?"

He was in a terrible temper, there was no doubt of that. Bamfield did what greater men have done. He decided to confuse the issue. "One of your wives — which wife?" he asked simply.

"Which wife! My wife, sir."

"Oh, yours? — and where is she?" All this

was very weak, but it served its purpose. The old gentleman was compelled from the complanatory to the explanatory. "My name is Baddeley-Boulger, of Green Streets. This dress is a valuable one, never worn, intended as a present —"

"A present to your wife, I presume?" interjected Bamfield.

The old gentleman choked, abandoned explanation and came back to his original demand. "I want to know, I insist upon knowing, if you are responsible for its present outrageous condition?"

"Well," began Bamfield, "supposing I am, for the sake of argument —"

"I am not here to argue; I am here for facts."

"Very well, then, the fact is that your wife's dress and my best pair of white trousers and I myself and — and a second party were involved in a disastrous affair."

"When?"

"Last evening."

"Where?"

"In the pond here."

"But how the devil —" He stopped, made a terrible effort, collected himself, and apologized to Rose. "Miss Nieugente, I believe? Forgive me; I don't see very well." He pulled out a spectacle-case, took out his glasses and put them on. "Be good enough to tell me exactly what happened, and what you propose to do."

"It will be easier for me not to tell you what happened," said Bamfield. "Another person is concerned, and till I have her permission I can't very well give you an explanation. But as for the dress, why it seems to me —" He stopped.

"Well, sir?"

"— It's been very carelessly handled."

Rose intervened. "It's dreadful to look at, Sir Arthur, but it's stuff that would clean, I'm sure."

"Oh, but, Miss Nieugente — cleaning! A lovely fabric, a poetic conception such as this, designed specially for my wife. It was for to-night, the fifth anniversary of our wedding, a surprise; and now—"

"I say!" said Bamfield genuinely. "I am so awfully sorry. It was a lovely dress; I don't know who designed it —"

"I designed it myself, sir."

"Well, 'pon my word, I understand how you feel, and I'm sure Lady Boulger would have done you credit in it. I'm really not so responsible as perhaps you take me to be, but if you'll be good enough to have it cleaned and will tell me where, I'll see, if you'll allow me, that Lady Boulger is not troubled with the bill."

The old gentleman was certainly mollified. "I am obliged, sir, but it was not for that purpose I came here. I rather wanted —" He paused, at a loose end. After all, the idea of the cane, he felt, had been absurd.

"Sir Arthur," said Rose, "I know just how you feel, and how Lady Boulger must feel. Let me introduce — Mr. Bamfield, Sir Arthur Baddeley-Boulger. — Let me have the dress, and I'll get it cleaned — it can be done, I'm certain, and though it will mean a little delay, you can still count on seeing Lady Boulger in it, and she'll look lovely." She turned to Bamfield. "You'll meet Lady Boulger, I hope, and you'll see for yourself."

"Honk!"

Beside the first motor a second had pulled up. A lady was walking rapidly towards them.

"Arthur!" she said to the old gentleman; then "Rose!" To Rose, then, "Is that it? — who dared —?" as she caught sight of the dress; then, "And this is the man?" as she stepped up to Bamfield . . .

She looked him over; he looked at her; then, "You!" she said.

"Me," said Bamfield.

They stared at one another. She was as blithe, her eyes as fine, her whole demeanour as frankly fascinating as when first he picked up her lucky sixpence in Oxford Street.

"Are you the man?" she asked.

"I am," he said. "Is that your dress?"

"Yes."

"Then you're Lady Baddeley-Boulger?"

"Yes, and — Oh, Arthur, Arthur!" She turned

in greatest excitement to her husband, took him by the arm, pointed to Bamfield. "This is the man."

"I know, my dear. He admits it."

"No, no; that's not what I mean. I mean, this is the man, Bamfield — the man you want, Bamfield —"

The old gentleman stared, dropped the frock, came over to Bamfield. "Are you Bamfield — J. M. Bamfield?"

"Yes."

"The painter?"

"Yes."

"Nudes, I think?"

"Solely, up to six months ago; since then landscape."

"Your pictures have been offered through a dealer named Iff —"

"— elstein. I kicked him into the pond last night. He is now in the hands of the police, but there's no chance of his remaining there."

The old gentleman shook his hand heartily. "Let me introduce myself. You know my wife. My name is Baddeley-Boulger of — Oh, I think I told you."

"Pleased to know you."

"A collector of pictures, and I think, regarded as not only an authority on modern art and artists, but as some one other collectors are inclined to

follow. I will only say that I am delighted, after all, at the mishap to the dress which has enabled me to make your acquaintance. I have been buying your pictures. My wife's request induced me to discover where I could find them for sale, and I had no hesitation in recognizing you as a master. Yours is a case, Mr. Bamfield, of a great genius in art stepping easily and early into fame —"

"Easily and early!" said Bamfield bitterly. "Do you know I'm thirty-three?"

"As young as that?" said Sir Arthur. "Marvellous! To think of the years of triumph that lie before you. Mr. Bamfield, you must let me touch on the subject — my wife has told me something of your affairs — your pictures are now fetching from two hundred to five hundred guineas apiece, and I predict a place for you not only among the artists of to-day, but among the great men of all times."

Bamfield felt a little breathless, but he instinctively turned to Rose, and put out his hand.

She caught it in hers. "Will it spoil our caravan?" she whispered.

"No, by Jove, it shan't," he told her.

Lady Boulger took Bamfield's arm, gave Rose a glance. "Now you know my name, don't you admire it?"

"I admire everything about you — as I did from the first."

She nodded, well pleased. "You've taken my advice, then?"

"Yes."

"There's only one thing — I wanted it to be the little girl in the studio wall."

"She is," said Bamfield.

"WHAT?"

"She is."

"WHAT!!!"

"She is," repeated Bamfield, and told her all about it.

THE END

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